

Fauna Imagery in Terracotta Art of Chandraketugarh

**Dr. Niraj Kumar Pandey
& Chandraneel Sharma***

Chandraketugarh (Lat. 22°41'N, Long. 88°42'E), an archaeological site in West Bengal, is situated in the district of North 24 Paraganas, about 38 kms. northeast of Kolkata. It covers a vast area of about 7.5 square kilometers comprising several villages. It is interesting to note that actually there is no village by the name of Chandraketugarh in the Survey of India maps. The place name is derived from a legend which revolves around a local Hindu king of the medieval period, Chandraketu, who had a conflict with a Muslim saint Syed Abbas Ali alias Gorachand. To be specific, the mound at village Berachampa/Deuliya is called "Chandraketur Garh" (the fort of king Chandraketu), which has been popularly compounded to Chandraketugarh. While this name can hardly have originated earlier than the 14th century, the antiquities for which Chandraketugarh is known actually predate this legend by more than a millennium.¹

In ancient times, Chandraketugarh region was well-equipped with the flowing water of rivers. We know that the two major channels of Gaṅgā, viz. Bhāgirathī-Hooghly in the west and Padmā in the east with their tributaries form the huge delta to end up in the Bay of Bengal. The entire drainage system of north-east India is serviced by these rivers and their branches. Today, the dying stream of Vidyādhari, once a strong branch of the Bhāgirathī-Hooghly, flows about six miles to the south of Chandraketugarh. Another branch of Bhāgirathī-Hooghly, also named the Padma, now a moribund channel, used to flow about a mile north of Chandraketugarh, in the shape of a loop, almost touching the Khana-Mihirer-Dhipi, which contains the ruins of a temple. The situation of Chandraketugarh contiguous to such a river only indicates the importance of the city.²

Excavation

After thorough exploration of the Chandraketugarh area by Āśutosh Museum of Indian Art, Kolkata University in 1955-56, archaeological excavations were carried out for about twelve years. Within limited resources, the University conducted excavations in several

* Dr. Niraj Kumar Pandey & Sri Chandraneel Sharma, Jñāna-Pravāha, Samne Ghat, Varanasi-221005

stages under the supervision of K. G. Goswami (1956-57 to 1961-62) and C. R. Roychoudhury (1962-63 to 1967-68). D. P. Ghosh and P.C. Dasgupta also joined in between. These excavations covered five different sites, viz. Berachampa (also called Deuliya or Devalaya), Khana-Mihirer-Dhipi, Itakhola, Noongola and Hadipur. Among these, though Berachampa is alternatively known as Chandraketugarh, but maximum attention was paid to Khanna-Mihirer-Dhipi by the excavators because of its fortified settlement area measuring more than a square mile and also the extensive occupational remains outside fortification.

The attempts by different excavators to identify various periods and to assign different dates, in fact, have added to the confusion. However, collating the excavated finds from different sites in the Chandraketugarh area, allowing scope for marginal adjustment, the following seven periods of occupation may be identified³ :

Period I : c. 600-300 BCE, corresponding to pre-Maurya

Period II : c. 300-200 BCE, Maurya

Period III : c. 200 BCE-50 CE, Śuṅga

Period IV : c. 50-300 CE, Kuṣāṇa

Period V : c. 300-500 CE, Gupta

Period VI : c. 500-750 CE, Post-Gupta

Period VII : c. 750-1250 CE, Pāla-Candra-Sena

Antiquities

The antiquities obtained from the sites of Chandraketugarh area through surface finds during explorations, excavations and sneaky diggings now and then, include pottery, terracotta figurines, plaques and toys, ivory, wood and bronze sculptures and utilities items, beads, seals, sealing, coins, etc. Excavated remains, like the private houses, a massive temple complex, a rampart wall and other highly sophisticated objects reveal that the inhabitants of Chandraketugarh region undoubtedly enjoyed a well developed urban lifestyle during heydays. The aesthetic sense of the producers and users of Chandraketugarh pottery was highly developed; many of the objects display a great degree of sophistication in variation of design and gesture as well as technical virtuosity. A wide range of potteries was found representing successive periods lasting altogether for more than a thousand years. Painted Grey Ware of coarse variety, Northern Black Polished Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Grey Ware with stamped designs, and Rouletted Ware dominated the pottery find.⁴

Terracotta

Chandraketugarh is particularly known for its variegated treasure of terracotta objects, which are not only found in abundance but also unveil extremely high degree of aesthetic

sense that the creators of these objects possessed. According to A. K. Bhattacharya - 'no other site in India has possibly yielded such numerous terracotta figurines of the Śuṅga-Kuṣāṇa period as Chandraketugarh. The figurines of Chandraketugarh have spread to different countries, enriching public and private collections.⁵ The terracotta art during this phase, no doubt, was practised on a larger scale in this region because of easy availability of superb quality of clay in the alluvial delta of lower Bengal. Its pliability allowed the artists to wield it to desired forms, shapes and sizes. Prosperity attained through trade and commerce also played role in enhancing this occupation. The most productive phase of the art was that of the Śuṅgas, covering the 2nd-1st centuries BCE. In this period, terracotta objects were as prolific in yield as they were varied in type and form. In the domestic life of the people their use was all-pervasive, meeting purposes spiritual as well as temporal. They included images of deities, animal figures, toys and decorative plaques. Seals cast from moulds were used as document and souvenir, and bore impression of figures and forms of artistic merit. Ornaments for women were also made out of this material.⁶

Characteristics and Technique

Kauśāmbī in Uttar Pradesh and Chandraketugarh in Bengal emerged as the two major centres of terracotta art during the Śuṅga period. Aesthetically, terracotta specimens unearthed from Chandraketugarh are far superior to those of Kauśāmbī. Probably, the quality of clay and imagination of skilled artisans made all the difference. The terracotta figurines of this period found from the Chandraketugarh area are mostly red in colour. Throwing light on the specimens obtained from Chandraketugarh, Enamul Haque writes-'It will amount to making a naive statement if the terracotta works of Chandraketugarh are taken as an expression of folk art. These were not the creations of the village artists living in the villages. Scores of plaques depict scenes reminiscent of complex urban culture which reflect intelligent observations. These include court-life, music, dance, coquetry, revelry, erotica, men on animals and chariots, and such themes which convincingly point to the customs and usages in an urban context. Even a casual glance would show that the terracotta and usages in an urban context. Even a casual glance would show that the terracotta works from Chandraketugarh are individual movable objects of art for the consumption of sophisticated individual connoisseur or votary.'⁷

The terracotta plaques are the most exuberant production of the Śuṅga phase depicting subjects of varied interests, like gods and goddesses (several forms of Lakṣmī have come to light along with Vasudhārā, Rati, Kāmadeva, Kubera, Nāgī, etc.), *gandharvas* and *apsarases*, *dampati* and *maithuna*, *kinnaras*, *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*, birds and animals (in

isolation or with other figures), etc. The narrative scenes, like *Udayaya-Vāsavadattā* episode and stories from *Pañcatantra* and *Rāmāyaṇa* also kept the artists busy. The versatile depictions of flora and fauna gave these artists almost a supernatural power of captivating their clientele. Some of the delicately executed plaques must have been the products of the high class skilled potters (*rāja-kumbhakāras*) mentioned by Pāṇini and in the *Jātakas*. These artists, instead of producing for the market, would work for the individual needs of select patrons such as the royal and *śreṣṭhin* families, and they would be paid rather handsomely.⁸

Interestingly, in spite of the fact that these plaques were produced out of single moulds and many of these showing obvious similarities, none is a perfect copy of another. A deep probing brings out the differences, if not in the main figure, at least in the subordinate figures or the decorative elements. This is quite enigmatic that how such discrimination was achieved and this is what makes the Chandraketugarh terracottas so special. Possibly, the proficient hands of the artisans neatly made alterations just after the figure was taken out of the mould and still wet. The vacant areas within the plaques were filled with floral designs. Holes made at the top were conducive for their hanging on walls. Besides plaques, terracotta sculptures are found in the form of toy-carts, rattles and sculptures in round, which are very few in comparison to plaque reliefs. Several specimens of moulds have also been unearthed.

Some Observations

Some notable points regarding terracotta art of Chandraketugarh are :

- (i) Sculptures depicting the themes related to Jainism in the art of Chandraketugarh are probably yet to be encountered.
- (ii) Representation of Buddha through symbols as depicted in the Śuṅga period art of Sanchi, Bharhut, etc. is also lacking in the region under review. It is a known fact that the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka's contribution in the spread of Buddhism within his Empire and outside is commendable. Then why this region of Bengal remained untouched is a point of investigation.
- (iii) Unlike Mathura and Kauśāmbī, the bearded male figures, often termed as foreigners, are conspicuously absent in the Chandraketugarh.
- (iv) Some figures sitting on animals have been identified as deities, for example the person on the back of a ram is identified as Agni. Similarly, one sitting on elephant is said to be Indra. But the notable point here is that the perfect canonization of iconographic details had not taken place during this period.

Fauna Imagery

The Mauryan courtly art lost its ground along with the break up of the empire. Thereafter,

the Śūṅga terracottas of second and first centuries BCE depicted a wide variety of themes, reflecting the broad spectrum of the society. Their religious and secular nature cannot be clearly demarcated. Beginning with rather flattened relief, ultimately, the Śūṅga artists became mature in producing figures with regulated contours produced by moulds and retouching.⁹ The depiction of fauna world is no exception where beautiful figures of birds, animals and aquatic creatures, both independently and alongwith other figures, were brought to life in clay by the artists of this period. Among these, elephant, horse, bull, lion, tiger, buffalo, deer, sheep, dog, cat, rhinoceros, monkey, corcodile, fish, snake, iguana, peacock, parrot, duck, crane, cock, hen, owl, etc. are noticeable. Composite figures of human beings and animals are also found. Notably, the artists of Chandraketugarh paid equal attention to the depiction of animals alongwith human beings, thus showing their close association with the contemporary society. Thus, we find the beautiful fauna world both in plaques and in round terracotta sculptures.

Elephant : Elephant, in ancient India, seems to be the most important animal as it could be used in numerous ways, such as in battle, hunting, procession, joyrides, entertainment, sports, decoration, etc. Thus, it developed a close relationship with the human beings and become an important subject for depiction in all forms of art creations, Needless to say, it found special place in the terracotta art of Chandraketugarh as well where it is shown indulged in various activities. Some important depictions of this majestic animal in terracotta art of Chandraketugarh are :

1. A standing elephant in round. The trunk is folded insided towards its mouth.¹⁰
2. A beautiful plaque depicts a sporty elephant balancing itself on a rounded structure and holding a mace-type object by its trunk thrown upwards.¹¹
3. A plaque shows three elephants; one in the middle and two on either side in a posture of anointment or swinging flywhisks.¹²
4. An elephant engaged in pulling down a banana tree with its trunk. The energy and movement of the elephant can be witnessed in this beautiful plaque.¹³
5. Elephant was used for decoration also. One such example can be cited on a fragment of oil lamp where a standing elephant is shown frontally between two honeysuckles.¹⁴
6. A toy-cart depicting an ornamented elephant with a rider. He is holding a rope-like object instead of goad.¹⁵
7. Fragments of terracotta plaques showing some sort of festive occasion, probably after harvesting of crops. People could be seen dancing and enjoying with drums,

trumpet, etc. and bunch of paddy stalks in hands. A decorated elephant with riders is the main attraction of this procession.¹⁶

8. A circular plaque, partly broken, depicts a procession where there figures are seen seated on the back of a walking elephant with upraised trunk. The central figure is sitting on a raised seat, may be a king or nobleman. Notably, the outer border of the plaque is decorated with flowers and birds.¹⁷
9. An interesting plaque shows an elephant, probably of a procession, suddenly going crazy and trying to pull down a tree with its trunk. Its anger is shown by its twisted tail and aggressive body-language. A frightened stag is shown running away from this furious animal, while the female on its back tries to control it with a goad in her hand. The terrified male figure sitting behind her and holding a banner in his hand, attempts to balance himself (Fig. 1).¹⁸
10. Another interesting plaque depicts a playful elephant trying to scare a young man, probably *yakṣa*. The animal not only places its trunk round his neck, but it also touches him with upraised left leg. The frightened man, on the other hand, raises his hands up to surrender and cries loudly with a wide-opened mouth. Such a humorous depiction of man and animal is only one of its kind.¹⁹
11. Another plaque, partly broken, depicting an elephant and a man presents a different mood. Here, the man is shown holding the trunk of an elephant with his left arm. Both are in amiable pose revealing their friendly relationship.²⁰

Horse : Horse, as we know, is one of the most friendly and faithful animals and is useful in more than one ways. In ancient and medieval India, horse formed the pivot of fast transportation, communication and even in the battlefields for making quick attacks. That is how, it became one of the all time favourite subject of the artists. Terracotta of Chandraketugarh also depicts this animal in several forms, such as :

1. Square plaques depict side view of a savage horse majestically moving ahead with its head bowed slightly downwards.²¹
2. A toy-cart of the front portion of a horse decorated with a broad necklece and stylized crest.²²
3. A broken plaque depicts a tamed horse in motion with upraised front right lag. A rider is sitting on its back but his upper portion is lost. A floral disc-type headgear decorates the horse.²³
4. Fragment of plaque shows a chariot being drawn by three horses. Two persons can be seen in the chariot.²⁴

Bull : Bull has been held in high esteem in Indian Culture since ancient times because of its utility in agricultural activities and transportation. Some examples of bull in terracotta art of Chandraketugarh are :

1. An oval plaque depicts a running bull with its tail rounded upwards.²⁵
2. A beautiful toy-cart show a nobleman driving a cart drawn by a pair of bulls.²⁶

Lion : In spite of being a carnivorous and unfriendly beast, the king of all animals, lion has been given a special place in Indian Culture since time immemorial because of its royal appearance, power, vigour and aggressiveness. Some important depictions of lion in terracotta art of Chandraketugarh are :

1. A circular plaque, partly broken, depicts a roaring lion in profile with upraised tail.²⁷
2. A plaque in the shape of a toy-cart depicts a man standing in a forest and holding a branch of tree with his upraised left hand. Two animals are seen on his either side. The one on proper left seems to be a lion with mane.²⁸

Tiger/Leopard : A unique feature of Chandraketugarh terracotta art is that even the carnivorous tiger or leopard also found a friendly place in it. We know that Bengal is especially known for tigers, but the spots on the body of this animal as depicted in terracotta art takes it nearer to leopard. Examples are :

1. A couple sitting on the back of a walking tiger/leopard. The man sitting in front carries a sword and a shield in his hands (Fig. 2).²⁹
2. A plaque, partly broken, depicts a tiger/leopard standing near the legs of a standing female figure and looking upwards towards his mistress. Considering its size in comparison to the female figure, some scholars consider it to be a pet cat.³⁰
3. A similar small sized tiger/leopard can be witnessed in a plaque, partly broken, seated at the feet of a standing young male figure. Here also, some scholars have taken it to be a pet cat.³¹

Deer/Stag : Being a harmless and non-violent animal, deer or stag have occupied a special place in all forms of artistic works since ancient times as a friend of man. It has been associated with beauty and therefore is shown usually with female figures. The deer was protected within the vicinity of hermitages since ancient times where hunting was prohibited. Some depictions of deer in the Chandraketugarh terracotta art are :

1. A worn out plaque depicts a standing stag turning round its head towards left and licking its back.³²
2. A beautiful plaque, partly broken, depicts a deer running away with her fawn in order to escape from some sort of danger in the forest. She turns her head backwards to assess its position.³³

3. A broken plaque depicts a fawn wearing a garland and standing near the legs of a female figure (head lost), looking upwards towards her face.³⁴

Ram : Some beautiful specimens of ram have been unearthed from the Chandraketugarh area in form of toy-carts. Examples are :

1. Several toy-carts showing forepart of ram, some plain and some ornamented, have come to light from Chandraketugarh.³⁵
2. Toy-carts depicting decorated ram with rider on its back.³⁶

Other Animals

Few renderings of other animals in terracotta, in isolation or with others, have also been obtained from the Chandraketugarh area. Some notable specimens are :

1. **Buffalo :** Mutilated plaques show buffalo in motion.³⁷
2. **Dog :** A beautiful rectangular plaque depicting a scene from the household of a rich family. A child sits on the floor holding a pet dog by a chain. Two ducks can also be seen on the side.³⁸
3. **Rhinoceros :** A mutilated plaque depicts a heavy bodied rhinoceros in motion.³⁹
4. **Monkey :** A rattle shows a monkey looking in front with palms placed on its knees (Fig. 3).⁴⁰

Aquatic Animals

Being associated with river, the basic source of food and water in the region, a good number of aquatic animals also found place in the terracotta art of Chandraketugarh. Some examples are :

1. **Crocodile and Fish :** A fragment of a water pot is recovered depicting crocodile and fish, both associated with water.⁴¹
2. **Fish as Decorative Motifs :** Broken part of a pitcher shows a number of fishes in relief on its outer surface facing upwards towards the neck.⁴²

Birds :

Birds, one of the important components of beautiful nature, have been one of the favourite subjects of artists. In Indian Culture, some birds have even been associated with deities as well, like owl with Lakṣmī, peacock with Skanda, swan with Sarasvatī, eagle with Viṣṇu and likewise. Birds were dealt with the terracotta artists of Chandraketugarh also and found place in several of their renderings.

Peacock : Peacock, the national bird of modern India, is the most beautiful of all birds and friendly to human beings. Hence, they were depicted strolling around in the forests or in residential areas in artistic works. Some examples of peacock depicted in Chandraketugarh

1. A toy-cart of a beautiful peacock with the spread plume and head turned to proper left.⁴³
2. This beautiful plaque depicts a profusely ornamented standing female figure with attendants. A number of birds are shown here, but the most prominent among them is a peacock with long plume seated on a branch.⁴⁴
3. Fragment of a plaque depicting a lady with right hand raised over her head, probably in dancing gesture, above which a beautiful peacock is shown in profile.⁴⁵

Parrot : Parrot is a pet bird. Examples of its depiction in Chandraketugarh terracotta are :

1. Circular plaque, mutilated, showing two parrots pecking at a bud face to face.⁴⁶
2. A number of rattles have been recovered showing a pot-bellied squatting male figure with a parrot perched on his right or left hand.⁴⁷
3. Fragment of a plaque showing a standing man holding a parrot in his left hand and feeding it with the right hand.⁴⁸
4. A plaque showing a standing female figure playing with a parrot perched on her right hand.⁴⁹
5. A plaque depicting a standing female figure with her left hand touching below the girdle over which is perched a parrot.⁵⁰
6. A plaque depicting a mother and child. A parrot is seen above perched on a tree.⁵¹

Crane : Terracotta artists of Chandraketugarh paid attention to depiction of cranes also in their creations. Some examples are :

1. A plaque showing a female figure with an attendant on her left and a crane on her right.⁵²
2. A plaque, broken at the bottom, depicts a standing female figure with her left hand hanging down and feeding a long-necked crane.⁵³
3. A plaque showing a heavily ornamented standing female figure with a crane strolling on her left.⁵⁴
4. Fragment showing a long-necked crane picked some food.⁵⁵
5. Fragment showing a crane strolling on the right of a pair of bejewelled human feet.⁵⁶

Other Birds

A few specimens of terracotta are obtained from Chandraketugarh depicting birds of other types, like :

1. **Duck :** Plaque showing a boy slightly bent and feeding two ducks with his right hand.⁵⁷
2. **Cock :** A square plaque depicting a cock holding a big worm in its beak.⁵⁸

3. **Hen** : A mutilated square plaque shows a hen with two chicks.⁵⁹
4. **Owl** : A mutilated owl in round.⁶⁰

Composite (*saṅghāṭa*) Figures

Like other places, mythical figures were also made by the terracotta artists of Chandraketugarh in the form of composite figures comparing two animals or animal and human being. Some examples are :

1. Fragment of a plaque shows a rider sitting on the back of a huge bird having the face of a lion.⁶¹
2. Fragment of a plaque depicting a man with elephant head beating a drum (*ghaṭavādya*) with his two hands.⁶²
3. A worn out plaque depicts a female figure with animal head, probably horse, in a flying posture carrying somebody on shoulders (Fig. 4).⁶³
4. A unique but mutilated plaque depicts a group of animal-headed figurines engaged in various activities. One figure sitting in front is playing a harp while the other is beating a drum (*ghaṭavādya*) (Fig. 5).⁶⁴
5. A slightly damaged toy-cart with a youthful human male bust having a beautiful plumage of a peacock forming its hind part (Fig. 6).⁶⁵
6. A plaque, restored, depicts a standing male figure with two upturned feathered wings appearing behind his two arms. This figure is identified as Kāmadeva, but it is merely a conjecture.⁶⁶
7. Toy-cart of winged-elephant engaged in water-sport holding a bunch of lotus and leaves in its trunk hanging downwards. Numerous such toy-carts have been obtained from Chandraketugarh region.⁶⁷

Animals with Deities

Animals in Indian Culture have always been given a special treatment and place in the society since ancient times. That is why, we find one or the other animal or bird being associated with some or the other deity, as a helping hand or as a mount. Some interesting terracotta rendering from Chandraketugarh depicting animals with deities are :

1. A fragment of a plaque shows a female figure with a lotus in her right hand. An elephant is saluting her with upraised trunk. She is identified as Gaja-Lakṣmī (Fig. 7).⁶⁸
2. A fragment of plaque showing an elephant with upraised trunk flanking a broken female figure (only hairpins visible) is probably that of Gaja-Lakṣmī.⁶⁹
3. A worn out plaque depicts a female figure standing on a crocodile. If this figure is

taken as Gaṅgā, then this would perhaps be one of the earliest depictions of the River-goddess (Fig. 8).⁷⁰

4. A beautiful plaque, depicting a standing female figure bespeaks the artistic skill of Chandraketugarh craftsmen. The fish-totem on the pole (*mīnadhvaja*) at the top right corner suggests that this could be Rati, as fish is associated with Kāmadeva. This view is corroborated by a big umbrella over her head and a winged man showering flowers on her from the sky.⁷¹
5. A plaque of a beautiful male figure with upraised wings appearing behind his shoulders. This figure is identified as Kāmadeva because of five arrows pointing downwards held in his right hand.⁷²
6. A plaque, broken at the bottom, depicts a female figure with her left hand akimbo and the right holding a pair of fishes (*mīna-mithuna*). This figure could possibly be of Vasudhārā (Fig. 9).⁷³
7. A mutilated plaque depicts four horses in a take off posture, two on each side and inner ones facing each other, drawing a chariot, which is now lost. This could be taken as the depiction of Sūrya, as similar depiction has come to light from the Bodhgaya railing. If taken as Sūrya, then it would be one of the earliest depictions of the Sun-god.⁷⁴

Animals with *Yakṣas*

Two types of *Yakṣas* found place in Indian art, benevolent and malignant. Both the types were rendered in the Chandraketugarh terracotta as well. Some interesting examples of the malignant type are :

1. A toy-cart of a seated *Yakṣas* holding a snake with both the hands.⁷⁵
2. A toy-cart of a seated *Yakṣas* holding a snake in his right hand and an iguana hanging from his right ear in form of an earring (Fig. 10).⁷⁶
3. A toy-cart of a seated *Yakṣas* holding an iguana in his right hand and biting its tail. The animal hangs with its head down.⁷⁷
4. An interesting toy-cart depicts a ferocious *yakṣa* holding a cup in his right hand and an elephant in his left hand. The significance of such a depiction is yet not known.⁷⁸

Animals in Architectural Motifs

Usually, motifs were carved out within the wall, ceiling, pillar or lintel itself to enhance the beauty of the architecture. Pillars, lintels, brackets, etc. were made with the purpose of providing strength of the building, but these were decorated with varieties of motifs so as to make them look beautiful also. Some example of such depictions, termed as Architectural Motifs, finding place in the terracotta art of Chandraketugarh are :

1. Fragment of a plaque shows the bell-shaped column with two horses facing away from each other but having only one body. Such motifs formed part of lintels in architecture with the aim to provide support.⁷⁹
2. A rectangular plaque depicts a couple in a palace standing between two octagonal pillars. The pillar on proper left depicts two bulls forming part of the bell-shaped capital and facing away from each other.⁸⁰
3. Fragment of a plaque depicts a seated winged lion forming the base of a column as a part of architecture.⁸¹
4. Fragment of a plaque shows a large peacock seated on the head of a squatting dwarf caryatid on the top of a column.⁸²

Animals in Combat Scenes

Whether between human beings or animals or birds or animals and human beings, fighting is one of the natural actions performed by all living creatures. This natural behaviour attracted the attention of artists also. Some specimens from Chandraketugarh depicting such combats are :

1. Fragment of a plaque depicts a lion engaged in some sort of activity with a man whose only one leg is visible. Probably, they are fighting.⁸³
2. Another fragment of a water-pot shows a man engaged in fighting with a crocodile with open mouth. A fish is on the other side below which a man is shown lying down.⁸⁴
3. An oval mutilated plaque depicts two elephants in combating pose with lifted forelegs and trunks entwined with each other.⁸⁵

Animals in Stories/Episodes

Stories play an important role in the development of any individual, society or culture. These stories are passed on from generation to generation and form an important component of a Culture. In the development of Indian Culture also, interesting stories and episodes have always been closely associated with the society. Thus, these find place in art renderings also. Some specimens unearthed from the Chandraketugarh region are :

1. Like Kauśāmbī, the famous episode of the elopement of Udayana and Vāsavadattā from Avanti found place in the terracotta art of Chandraketugarh. In this depiction, Vāsavadattā is generally shown sitting in front with the king and his court-jester Vasantaka behind her on the back of an elephant. In the terracotta of Kauśāmbī, Udayana is shown holding a *vīṇā* in his hand, which is absent in Chandraketugarh terracotta plaques. Secondly, the coins are thrown by the jester in Kauśāmbī art, but

in Chandraketugarh, the money-bag is shown in the hand of the king. The episode of elopement can be felt through the quick motion of elephant (Fig. 11).⁸⁶

2. A plaque depicts an elephant slightly bowing down and walking with a crocodile as if busy in conversation. This scene, probably, is a depiction of some story popular in the region.⁸⁷
3. A fragment of a plaque depicts some festive occasion or gathering with heavily bejewelled male and female figures. A galloping elephant with a rider on its back is shown in the corner moving away from the crowd. Interestingly, some other creatures are also shown in the plaque in between the human figures. The significance or story associated with this depiction is not known as yet.⁸⁸
4. A number of plaques depicting the famous story from *Pañcatantra* of the friendship of a monkey and a crocodile have been obtained from Chandraketugarh. The monkey is shown seated at the back of crocodile.⁸⁹ One such plaque is preserved in the Jñāna-Pravāha Museum also (Acc. No. 2003.38)(Fig. 12).
5. A mutilated square plaque shows two standing monkeys in the act of wrestling. This depiction is considered to be the famous combat between Vālī and Sugrīva as described in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁹⁰

Conclusion

Aesthetically, the terracotta art of Chandraketugarh during Śuṅga period surpassed all the contemporary schools. The rapid development and process of urbanization boosted the terracotta art, which sprang up to achieve the status of an industry. Their production in abundance with advanced modelling indicates that these objects were created to meet the demands of the upper class of the society. The world of flora and fauna were also given due importance in artistic creations with variations, which could be witnessed in the available specimens from the region. Thus, Chandraketugarh terracotta stands out with distinction as it has carved a niche for itself in the history of early Indian art.

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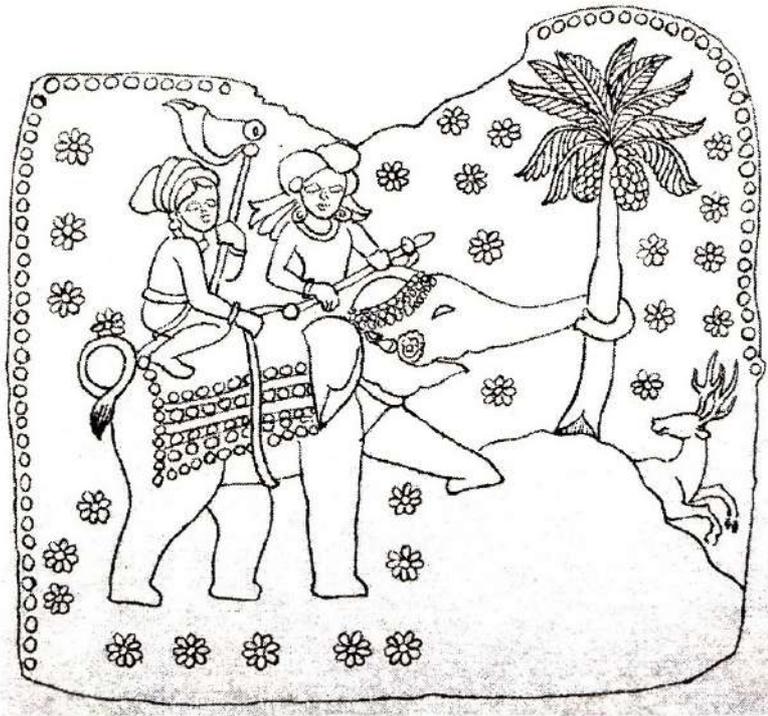


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

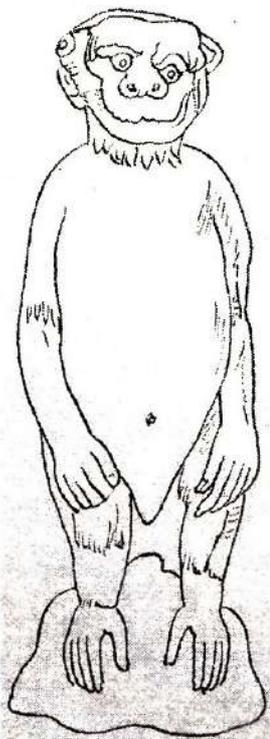


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

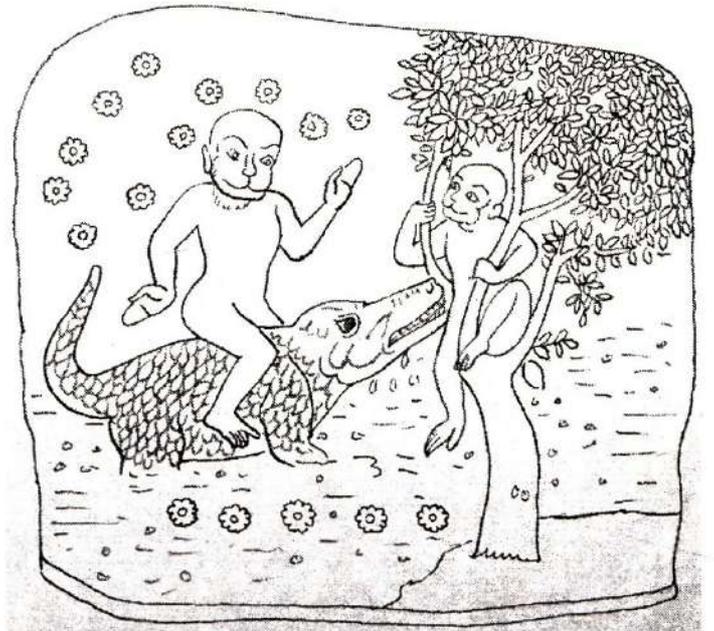


Fig. 12