

## Varanasi-paṭṭa from Rajasthan: A New Variation

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Dr.Kirit Mankodi Mumbai happened to see an interesting stone slab (about 3'x1'1/2x6") in the sculpture shed of Archaeological Survey of India at Krishna Vilas, district Bārān in Rajasthan (Fig.1). We are grateful to him as he favoured us with a fine photograph of this slab for identification.

Datable to c. 11th century this slab with triangular top is divided in seven horizontal bands. The top shows worship of a liṅga by two standing devotees (Fig.2, top, I, II bands). Near their feet on each side appears a worshipper seated in namaskāra-mudrā. Amongst the latter two, the one on right is flanked by a liṅga, while the space in front of the corresponding devotee on left remains blank. This is strange.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Could there be also a *liṅga*, which is now missing? Below this triangular top the first band opens with a niche having a seated male figure, perhaps four-armed of bulky body built. To his left there are nine *liṅgas* each in a separate niche. Amongst them the second, seventh and probably the eighth seem to be *mukhaliṅgas*, of *caturmukha* or better known as *pañcāsya* type, only the three faces being visible. The second band again opens with a *liṅga* placed on decorated pedestal. Thus the total *liṅgas* depicted are thirteen; and if the missing one is added, the number would be fourteen.

Followed by the opening *liṅga* in the second band there are six female figures of which the third one is seated cross-legged, while others are standing. They are all four-armed with different attributes in hands.

The third band (Fig.3, III, IV, V bands) depicts four *Gaṇeśa* figures with a full fledged elephant (*Gajavināyaka*) in profile facing left in centre. Next band has seven figures of *Sūrya* with full-blown lotuses in their raised hands.

The fifth band is more interesting. Four-armed *Viṣṇu* is seen in its opening

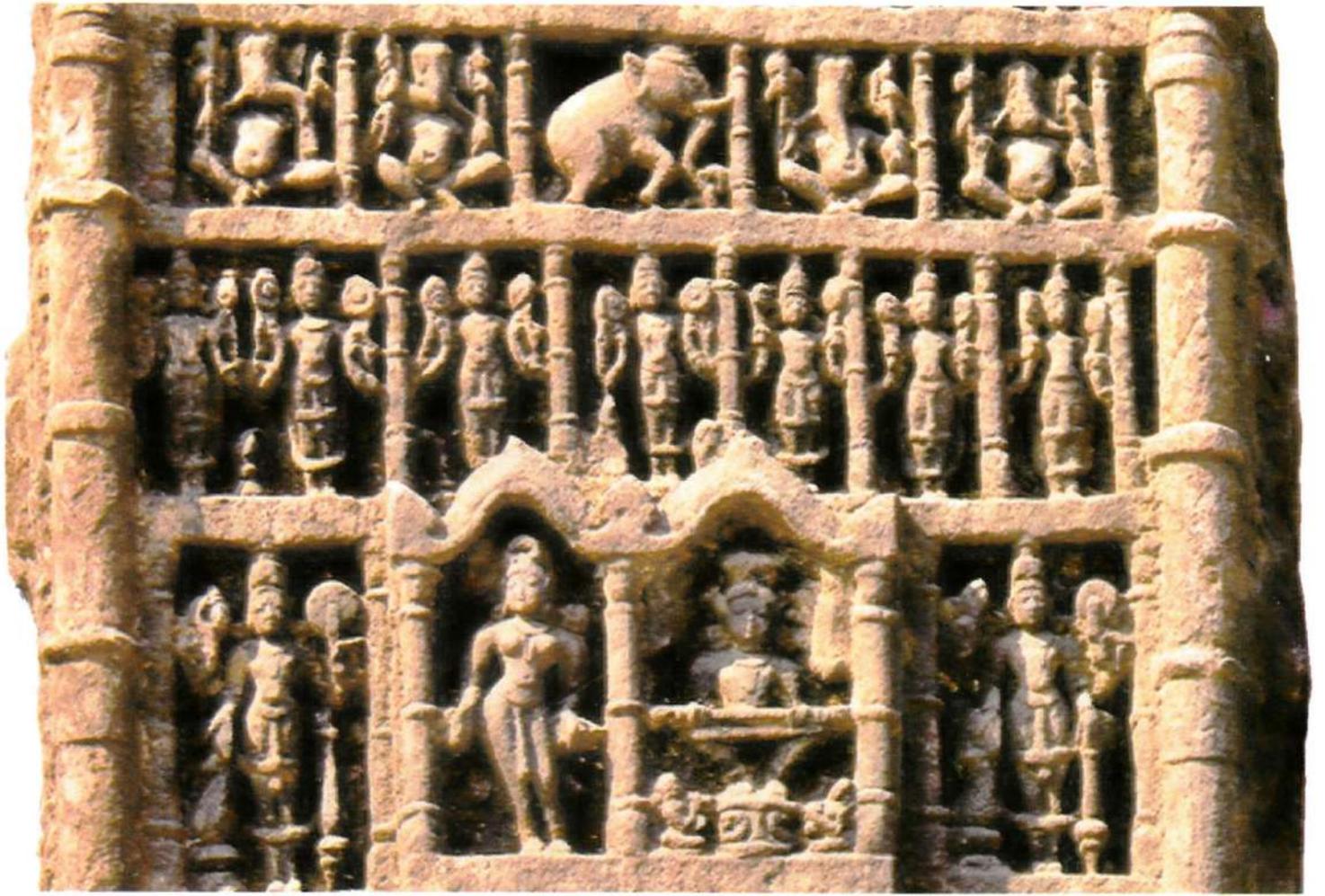


Fig. 3

and ending niche respectively. The middle part shows a little projected platform with two separate arched niches. The one on right has a two-armed female divinity standing in tribhaṅga. The attributes, if any, are not clear. The niche to her left, which is bigger in size has a male figure seated in pralambapādāsana pose holding a long staff (daṇḍa) in both of his hands placed horizontally on knees. A yogapaṭṭa seems to be running round his folded knees. On each side of his decorated footstool (pādapiṭha) there is a devotee seated with hands joined in adoration. Obviously these two figures are most significant in the composition. The last two bands have additional ten Viṣṇu figures in groups of five each. All the twelve Viṣṇus appear with śaṅkha and cakṛa in their upraised right and left hands and gadā in normal left. The suspended normal right seems to be in varada-mudrā. The thick bud-like object below it is merely a decorative motif covering the blank space.

## Identification

Prima facie a broad identification of this slab presents no difficulty as we are already in know of three more or less similar slabs from Gwalior and Jhansi almost contemporary in date.<sup>1</sup> Following the description of Paṭṭaśālā Varanasi, in the Aparājitaṭṭchā<sup>2</sup> and mention of various deities in the Kāśikhaṇḍa of the

Skandapurāṇa,<sup>3</sup> Varanasi, the famous centre of pilgrimage, has been depicted therein. While doing this the sculptors have already taken enough liberties also. For example none of the three slabs shows each and every deity, and that too in the prescribed numbers as laid down in the Aparājitapṛcchā. In every slab there are a few deletions or additions. The Krishna Vilas slab under reference is no exception. Herein the fourteen Siddha-liṅgas or Mahā-liṅgas, twelve Keśavas, five Gaṇāpatis, seven out of twelve Ādityas or Sūryas, which are common to all others can be well identified. So is the case with the central deities namely personified Vārāṇasī and seated Śiva with daṇḍa in hands.

However the opening male figure in the first band and six female divinities in the second band are problematic. The latter group clearly shows that all are four-armed, but five of them are standing and one, almost in centre, is seated cross-legged on decorated seat. Apparently the five form a group by themselves and seated one is totally independent. In their suspended normal left hands, the standing deities, specially the first, second, fourth and fifth carry ghaṭa; in case of the third this ghaṭa is seen on right duly placed on ground. The normal right is suspended, the attribute held, if any, is not clear. Could there is a mālā as looks in the case of the third one? All the five have different attributes in their, extra upraised hands; amongst them cakra, aṅkuśa, pāśa and padma rather padma-kalikā can be distinctly marked.

Regarding identification of these five we venture to throw a suggestion. The Aparājitapṛcchā<sup>4</sup> makes mention of five Līlās (pañca-līlā) among the deities to be shown present in Paṭṭaśālā Varanasi. These are probably the Pañca-Laliyās described elsewhere in the same work. The Laliyās are said to be four-armed with beautiful face, fine eyes, red lips, conch-like neck, eye catching form and golden luster. All carry rosary (akṣa-sūtra) and water vessel (kamaṇḍalu) in there lower hands, but the attributes in the upraised hands (ūrdhva hasta) vary in each case as detailed below:

Līlayā – Pair of lotus (mṛṇāla yugma).

Līlā – Lotus and book (padma-pustaka).

Līlāṅgī – Noose and lotus (pāśa, padma).

Lalitā – Thunderbold and goad (vajra, aṅkuśa).

Līlāvātī – Noose and goad (pāśa and aṅkuśa).

As said above many of these attributes are seen in the hands of the five figures under reference, though perhaps not in the order prescribed.

Identification of the central seated figure among these five is somewhat more difficult, though she appears as a significant goddess. Annapūrṇā, Gaṅgā and Maṅikarṇikā are the three female divinities closely associated with Varanasi. Iconographic features of Annapūrṇā and Gaṅgā are altogether different. Those of Maṅikarṇikā have been described in Kāśīkhaṇḍa.<sup>5</sup> She is four-armed, two of her hands are joined together (prabaddha-kara sampuṭa) and other two have lotus garland (indīvaravatī mālā) in right and fruit mātulūṅga in the left. Could she be Maṅikarṇikā, though barring the four-armed aspect, certainty of attributes is questionable.

No suggestion is being proposed for the bulky male figure seen seated in the opening niche of the first band.

The Krishna Vilas slab, though intended to serve as Varanasi-paṭṭa stands as unique for the following features:

- (i) Liṅga-worship on the topmost part.
- (ii) Three multi-faced liṅgas in the first band.
- (iii) Depiction of Pañca-Laliyās, not seen in any of the other slabs.
- (iv) Appearance of Gajavināyaka in full profile form facing left.
- (v) Significant depiction of Varanasi, and seated daṇḍadhara Śiva to her left, flanked by devotees on a common projected platform (ekapīṭha-samārūḍha).
- (vi) All the twelve Viṣṇus carry śaṅkha, cakra and gadā clockwise. If padma is presumed in normal right hand, this would be the form of Keśava as laid down in the Parameśvara Saṁhitā,<sup>6</sup> and Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā.<sup>7</sup> The twelve Viṣṇus have already been identified as Keśavas of Kāśīyātrā in Varanasi.
- (vii) Bulky seated male in the first band, which remains unidentified.

## References

1. N.P.Joshi, 'Varanasi Śilāpaṭṭas and Similar slabs in the Medieval Sulptures of Central India', Samskriti Sandhāna, Varanasi, 2, 1989, pp.143-159.
  - Id., 'Davapaṭṭa, A less Known Chapter of Hindu Iconography, Eastern Approaches', Essays on Asian Art and Archaeology, Ed. T.S.Maxwell, Delhi, 1992, Pls. 46, 47, 48, pp.135-136.
2. Aparājitapṛcchā, 74.20-25, p.181
3. Skandapurāṇa, Kāśikhaṇḍa (Mor Edition, Calucutta) for lists of:
  - 14 Siddhaliṅgas, 73.30-36, p.524
  - 14 Mahāliṅgas, 73.44-49. pp.525-26
  - 12 Ādityas, 46.45-47, p.332
  - 12 Keśavas, 61. 5-26, p.429
  - 5 Gaṇapatis, 100.85-88, p.696; 67.124, p.339,
4. Aparājitapṛcchā, 222.20-25, p.572:
  - ललीयाः पञ्च वक्ष्यामि शस्त्रभेदैः प्रभेदिताः  
लीलया, लीला, लीलाङ्गी, ललिता च लीलावती ॥
  - प्रोक्तास्तथाऽनुक्रमतः स्वासनस्था? चतुर्भुजा  
तप्तकाञ्चनवर्णाभा बालसूर्यसमप्रभाः ॥
  - सुवक्त्राश्च सुनेत्राश्च सुरूपा रूपदायिकाः  
रक्तोष्ठा कम्बुग्रीवाश्च कर्णपूरायतेक्षणाः ॥
  - अक्षसूत्र कमण्डलू अधोहस्तेषु कामदाः  
सर्वासामिदृशौ हस्तौ कथ्येते चोर्ध्वहस्तकौ ॥
  - मृणालयुग्मं ललीया (लीलया) लीला पद्मं च पुस्तकम् ॥  
लीलाङ्गी पाशपद्मश्च ललिता वज्राङ्कुशम् ॥
  - पाशाशु लीलावती ललीयाः पञ्च चेरिताः

इति पञ्चाललीयाः
5. Skandapurāṇa, Kāśikhaṇḍa 61.88-93, p.434
  - प्रत्यक्षरूपिणी देवी दृश्यते मणिकर्णिका  
चतुर्भुजा विशालाक्षी स्फुरद्भालविलोचना ॥
  - पश्चिमाभिमुखी नित्यं प्रबद्धकरसम्पुटा  
इन्दीवरवती माला दधती दक्षिणे करे ॥
  - वरोदयतकरे सव्ये मातुलुङ्गफलं शुभम्  
कुमारी रूपिणी नित्यं नित्यं द्वादशवार्षिकी ॥
6. Parameśvara., Kriyākhaṇḍa, 23.72.78-after Kalpana Desai, Iconography of Viṣṇu, New Delhi, 1973, p.151
7. Ahirbudhnya., 26.33-46, p.231