

An Apparent Oddity in Iconography

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The goddess Lakshmi is associated with the owl almost invariably in the images of the goddess worshipped in eastern India, particularly in Bengal. In the images worshipped annually on the fifth day of the bright moon (*Shukla-panchami*) of the month of Ashvina (usually October), the owl is shown by the side of the goddess, and it is the current belief that the bird *pechaka* or *uluka* (owl) is the *vahana* (vehicle of associate) of the goddess concerned. The goddess is also worshipped by the housewives weekly, on every Thursdays, particularly in Bengal. The images of the goddess meant for the weekly worship too invariably show the owl as the *vahana*. The goddess Durga is worshipped in Bengal during the spring (*vasantipooja*) and in the autumn (*sharadiya-durgapooja*) in her form as the destroyer of the buffalo demon (*mahishasuramardini*). The image used for this purpose shows the goddess in the company of several other complementary deities (*parshvadevata*) of which the goddess Lakshmi is one. There too, the latter is invariably represented with the owl as the *vahana*. In fact, in the eastern Indian iconographical psyche, the association of the owl with the goddess Lakshmi is inseparable and deep-rooted.

The meaning of the above mentioned association is quite perplexing. The goddess Lakshmi epitomizes the absolute of female grace and beauty (*roopalavanya*). Moreover, she is supposed to be the bestower of treasures and riches (*dhana-sampat*). On the contrary, the bird owl bears an uncouth presence and it does not seem to have an immediate relationship with the material prosperity that Lakshmi is capable of bestowing. In fact, the conceptual and iconographic relationship between the goddess and the bird concerned is incongruous and

discordant. But in matters of cultural relationships logicity is not always a substance of the surface. Linkages often get blurred due to the distance of the time of the initial tie-up, and this happens more when something unconventional takes place.

The logicity of the association of the owl with Lakshmi has been enquired into by several scholars in their respective ways. Various explanations have been put forth, and each of them is supported with cogent contextual arguments. Although none of them bears the stamp of finality, some of the important interpretations in this respect should be taken note of in order that we can understand why this apparently inconsistent imagery did originate and sustain through the years in Bengal at least, if not in the other parts of eastern India with equal enthusiasm.

As the consort of Vishnu, Lakshmi is the female counterpart of Vishnu or the *Vaishnavi-shakti*. Thus, following the general principle upheld by the *Devimahatmya* section of the *Markandeya-purana* that the mother goddesses bear the *vahana* and attributes of their male counterparts (*yasya devasya yadrupam yatha bhushanavahanam / tadvadeva hi tachchhaktirasuran yoddhumayaya*).¹ Lakshmi should be associated with Garuda, the *vahana* of Vishnu. The eastern Indian convention of substituting the Garuda with the owl may not be an intentional one. Garuda being a bird of mythical imagination, and the owl being a common avian character with mysterious nature, the latter beguiling the popular imagination for the substitution cannot be ruled out.

All the three sons of Vinata, viz., Uluka (owl), Aruna and Garuda are *andaja* (born of an egg), as is evident from the Puranic legends pertaining to Vinata-Kadru² suggests. Thus all of them have avian characters with, of course, occasional exigent human behavior and presence. Interestingly, both Garuda and Aruna have distinctive Vaishnavite association - the former as the exclusive *vahana* of Vishnu, and the latter as the foremost charioteer of Surya, the solar presence of Narayana-Vishnu. The eldest of the trio, namely Uluka (owl), was handicapped in the sense that he was *divandha* (blind during the daytime). It is likely that the eastern Indian imaginative mind fancied that out of sheer compassion for Uluka,

the eldest brother of Garuda, the ardent *vahana* of Vishnu, the goddess Lakshmi redeemed the despised handicapped stature of Uluka by making him her constant companion. The precedent act of a similar compassionate rehabilitation being meted by Surya to Aruna who was handicapped as *anuru* (having unformed lower body beginning the thigh) might have prompted the origin of such a popular conception.

The association of the owl with the goddess Lakshmi might have percolated through the proverbial story of a relentless enmity existing between the crow and the owl (*kakolukiya*).³ The crow (*kaka*) being traditionally known as the *vahana* (vehicle) and *dhvaja* (insignia) of Alakshmi⁴ (the negation of Lakshmi, in other words, the goddess who upholds the reverse values of Lakshmi), as a natural corollary the owl (*uluka*) got associated in the popular thinking with the goddess Lakshmi, the harbinger of good fortune and auspiciousness. Incidentally, the crow or the Kaka is also handicapped because of his blindness at night.

Although serpent worship is an ancient Indian cultural tradition, it cannot escape notice that Vaishnavite legends assign a subordinate, and even an inimical role to the *nagas* (serpents). Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu not only is known to eat the *nagas* and *naginis* (male and female serpents) at will, but is the dreadful chastiser of them in various ways, including the forcing of them to serve, in the suspended trepidation of being devoured at any moment, as his personal adornments. Vishnu is known to have the serpent Ananta or Shesha as his seat or bed. Moreover, in his incarnation as Krishna, he had chastised the notorious serpent Kaliya in the severest way. Keeping tune with the anti-*naga* attitude of the Vaishnava legends, Lakshmi, the foremost goddess of the cult, could not but have a more appropriate associate than the owl who is a known enemy of the snakes. In other words, it is likely that the concept of the image of Lakshmi in the company of the owl bears the visual message that the worship of the goddess ensure not only the flow of good fortunes, but also the safety against the snakes who are a constant menace to the householder and to the agriculturists working in the open fields.

The possibility of the origin of the concept of the association of the goddess Lakshmi with the owl as a notional antidote to the serpent menace deserves

deeper scrutiny. The origin of the concept of the association of the goddess with the owl, even in the eastern Indian context, does not seem to go beyond a couple of centuries. No image of Lakshmi with the owl known from ancient sculptures or paintings from eastern India can be placed prior to the eighteenth century, and literary references to such an imagery ostensibly are not of earlier dates. It is thus apparent that the concept of the association of the owl with the goddess Lakshmi was fabricated at a comparatively recent time, and perhaps due to a regional exigency. In the mainstream iconographical tradition, the owl is associated Nirrti with Chamunda.⁵ The extension of the same to Lakshmi bearing no immediate conceptual relationship to the former two deities seems verily due to the needs of the ever-expanding folk traditions of eastern India.

In this connection the impact of the dominating *Mangalakavya* tradition in the mediaeval period in eastern India, particularly in Bengal, should be taken into consideration. Through the *Chandimangala*, *Manasamangala* and *Dharmamangala* the cults respectively of Chandi (the goddess of the mainstream Shaktas), Manasa (the goddess of the sub-stream serpent-worshipping Shaktas) and Dharmathakura (the abstract presence of the Brahmanical Trinity at the folk level) were projected before the people virtually with propagandist postures.⁶ In order to register exclusive popularity, these cults often did usurp concepts from the rivals to dilute their claim to superiority. This is a common ploy adopted by the contending cults to counterbalance the prospective highlights of the rivals. The above-mentioned cults, as also several others floating at the grass-root level, could not remain mutually exclusive in terms of concepts and the modes of their visualization.

In terms of popularity and domination the cult of Manasa or the serpent cult became very formidable in medieval eastern India not only at the folk level, but also was threateningly trying to usurp the position of eminence upper strata of the society.⁷ This might have alerted some of the rival cults to thwart the expanding power and influence of the rival. The cult of Manasa had a tremendous impact on the popular mind because it not only projected a curative prospect, but also bore a punitive posture. It advocated that the worship of the serpent goddess

Manasa will ensure safety from snake-bite and related poisonous sufferings, but the refusal to do so will induce the wrath of the goddess in the form of snake bites and similar distresses. It is not without any reason that in the *Dharmamangalākāvya*, the owl is made a constant associate of the cult, namely Dharma-Thakura.⁸ The intended message of this iconographical provision is quite clear : do not be afraid of Manasa's snakes, the owl of Dharma-Thakura is there to scare them off.

The long-established cult of goddess Lakshmi at the domestic level might have moments of threatened insecurity from the ever-increasing awe-inspired domination of the cult of the serpent goddess Manasa. It is possible that the owl was introduced in the image of the goddess Lakshmi in eastern India to counterbalance, as in the case of the cult of Dharma-Thakura, the menace of the serpent progenies of Manasa. As the *Vaiṣṇavi-shakti*, Lakshmi's association with Garuda, the relentless enemy of the snakes, was already recognized, but the agonizing terror of the snakes being vigorously projected by the cult of Manasa in eastern India needed to be thwarted with an antidote better understood at the popular level. Compared to the efficiency of the Garuda, who virtually is a mythical or symbolic presence, that of the owl in the role of the destroyer of snakes is a matter of reality closer to the ordinary people. Thus the presence of the owl in the image of Lakshmi could be the visual affirmation of an ensured protection from the terror of snakes that apprehended many prospective followers to the compulsion of joining the cult of Manasa. A similar phenomenon of the introduction of a visual antidote of snakes could be noticed in the image of the goddess Sarasvati. Although the association of this goddess with the swan (*hamsa*) is well known in the north Indian context, in the south Indian images the goddess is represented in the company of the peacock, a confirmed enemy of the snakes. The substitution of the swan with the peacock in the iconography of south Indian images of Sarasvati ostensibly bears a local exigency to counterbalance the overpowering influence of the serpent domination.

However, from the study of the *Mangalākāvya*s it is apparent that in Medieval eastern India there existed an internecine strife between the cults of

Mansa and of Chandi. Both the cults had the discomfort of assuming aggressive postures to exact obedience. In order to make a stride over the rival cult of Manasa, the Chandi cult floated an exclusively benign offshoot, namely, the cult of Mangalachandi or benevolent Chandi.⁹ This benevolent opponent of Mansa doubtless expedited a place of greater acceptability in the popular mind, and more so perhaps in the houses of the merchant community. Rich merchants like Chand Sadagar or Dhanapati Sadagar sided with the emergent cult of the benign goddess more than with the serpent goddess Manasa who retained a pugnacious role. The patronizing role of the business community (the *vanikas* or the *baniyas* of the later days) was instrumental in getting the ideology floated that the devotees of the benign form of the goddess Chandi obtain affluence primarily through trade and commerce (*vanijya*). Eventually, this benevolent form of Chandi got conceptually identified with Lakshmi, the Vaishnavite Shakti, who already had a large following even at the domestic level in eastern India. This conceptual identification led to the currency, at the common parlance, of the belief that one can obtain fortunes or the grace of the goddess Lakshmi by means of commercial pursuits (*vanijye vasate lakshmih*).

However, Indian domestic affluence is primarily based on the agricultural economy (*krishikarma*), and trade and commerce thrive on the bounty of the agrarian products. People are eager not only to reap a bountiful harvest, but they are equally concerned about the proper preservation of the yield ensuring safety against any loss or drainage. According to some scholars, owl “feed on various small animals particularly the squirrels, rats and mice which cause damage to crops and are therefore greatly beneficial to agriculture”.¹⁰ As the savior of agricultural losses the owl plays a very distinctive role which appositely endeared it to the people contemplating on building up agricultural fortunes. It is not surprising that they will readily associate the owl, as a gesture of thanksgiving, with Lakshmi, the Goddess they identify with domestic and professional fortunes.

Although the owl is associated with Lakshmi in eastern Indian images of the goddess possibly due to its benevolent role in the agricultural pursuits, this bird elsewhere is considered to be the symbol of evil and inauspiciousness. This

bird is associated with Lilith, the Mesopotamian goddess of evil, the Egyptian ghosts, and with the spirit of the wailful mother of the Arabian notion.¹¹ However, it should be appreciated that to counter evils the efficacy of evils is an established fact, and moreover, the transformation of the west Asiatic concept of evil in a particular context to the eastern Indian version of agricultural benevolence is not altogether impossible.¹² Incidentally, it should be pointed out that even in eastern India, particularly in Bengal, two varieties of the owl (*pencha* or *pechaka*) are referred to, namely, *the lakshmi pencha* (the owl of the goddess Lakshmi or the sober owl) and the *bhutum* or *hutum-pencha* (the ghostly or evil owl.) The former is usually white in colour, while the latter bears grayish dark feathers.

The association of the owl with the goddess Lakshmi is often interpreted on a philosophical level. The owl is seen as the metaphor of self-discipline (*samyama*) which is the basic requirement of a person seeking good fortune (*Laksmih*). Calm introspection in the din and bustle of the daytime, and full alertness during the snoozing calmness of the night are supposed to be the symptoms of a self-restrained disciplinarian (*muni*), according to the *Bhagavadgita*.¹³ The day-blindness and night-alertness of the owl are thought to be the natal characteristics entitling it to be the natural analogue of the above-stated qualifications of a self-disciplined saint (*samyami-muni*) who cannot but be in constant company with fortunes, and for that matter, with the goddess Lakshmi.

In the tantric Buddhist pantheon there is a deity called Uluki (female owl), Ulukasya or Ulukamukhi (she with the face of an owl) who usually is an attendant goddess guarding the gates of the *mandala* (auspicious space).¹⁴ Interestingly, here too, she is often described as riding on snakes,¹⁵ retaining the anti-serpent posture symptomatic of the attitudes of the cults of Chandi, Mangala-Chandi or Lakshmi trying to neutralize the rising domination of the cult of the serpent goddess Manasa. In tantric Buddhism, however, there are other goddess like Mahamayuri and Janguli, bearing antidotes to serpent poison.¹⁶ The last mentioned goddess is often identified with the goddess Sarasvati.¹⁷ The eastern Indian representation of Lakshmi with the owl, the antidote for serpents, might be a deceptive way of showing Lakshmi and Sarasvati together, although they are traditionally known

to be the rivals.¹⁸ The cult of domestic Lakshmi (*grihalakshmi*) in eastern India might have made a working rapprochement with the anti-serpent aspect of the Buddhist Sarasvati with a view to counter the cult of Manasa.

It is well-known that the Buddhists had already co-ordinate the cults of Lakshmi and Sarasvati in the six-handed form of the goddess Vasudhara,¹⁹ the deity representing both wealth and wisdom. The goddess Janguli was also conceived with dual roles.²⁰ Although basically she represents the power to neutralize the serpent venom (*sarpavisha*), she also has the ability to impart knowledge and acumen to become well-versed in all branches of knowledge, to become a post, an adept in countering all kinds of poison, and even the grace of Vishnu, the Lord of Garuda (*garudesvatvam kavitoam sarvashastravisharodatvam sarvavishaharatvam*).²¹ The relevance of poetic ability and command over *shastras* in this prospective claim could only be understood in terms of a cultic manifesto meant for superseding that of the rival. What the cult of Janguli had tried to do in the Buddhist context was done by the eastern Indian Brahmanical faith perhaps in a different dispensation. By introducing the owl in the image of the goddess Lakshmi it was doubtless contended that the latter is not only the goddess of treasures and fortunes, but is also the bestower of knowledge of the proverbial *samyami-muni*, as mentioned above, and of the power to protect the devotee from all possible threats of the serpents.

It has already been pointed out that the cults of Chandi, Mangala-Chandi, and Lakshmi maintained an intimate relationship with the merchant community. Particularly the aphorism – *vanijye vasate lakshmih* – made this community more devotionally inclined towards the goddess Lakshmi who become intimately associated with two male deities, namely, Kubera or Dhanada, who is the divine master of all treasures and Ganesha, who is the giver of success (*siddhidata*) in all forms of enterprises.²² The relationship between Lakshmi and Dhanada-Kubera deserves special mention because this has been highlighted in the Buddhist context as well, particularly in the iconographical traditions. As the lord of all treasures, Kubera is the bestower of riches (*dhanada*) and he is thus known as Dhanada. Similarly, Lakshmi is the giver of money and affluence, and thus known

as Dhanada. The conceptual relationship between the two is well-established. But the tantric Buddhism seems to have augmented the bond even further with shared features of iconography.

The tantric Buddhist pantheon floated a new concept of Dhanada-Kubera-Vaisravana. By clubbing these three deity-concepts together, and by adding some new concepts, they projected a deity called Jambhala. The latter ostensibly is a composite deity, and is thus more than any of the three deities like Dhanada, Kubera and Vaisravana.²³ But, like all these previously-known divinities, Jambhala was conceived essentially as the god of wealth. Vasudhara, the Buddhist goddess of wealth and treasures, was associated with Jambhala as his female consort. Thus Jambhala became very popular in the pantheonistic devotion of tantric Buddhism.²⁴

In fact, Jambhala was introduced virtually as a male parallel of the goddess Lakshmi who was already well-established as the bestower of riches and eliminator of poverty. Interestingly, Jambhala, like Lakshmi, is prayed to for monetary treasures (*dhanam me dehi svaha*).²⁵ He is characterized as the unlimited repository of riches (*dhanadhanyaksayavrittih*)²⁶ and as the constant supplier of money (*dhanapradanena satatam*).²⁷ He is known as the giver of riches of all kinds (*bahuidhadhananivaham*).²⁸ Like Lakshmi, Jambhala is projected as one who enhances fortune and good health (*sau bhagyarogyevardhana*).²⁹

It is further contended that the devotee of the Uchchhushma form of Jambhala is capable of, like the great lord of treasurers (*vittanatha prabhuriva*) eliminating all evils of poverty (*harati sa ti drisa sarvadaridryadhukham*).³⁰ Uchchhushma is the terrible form of Jambhala. Interestingly, a justification is put forth for the introduction of this terror-inducing form of the deity. It has been argued that people inflicted with the misery of poverty are unlikely to have the proper mind to pursue Buddhistic devotion, and, in view of this, the Uchchhushma (fearful) form of Jambhala was conceived in order to drive away these inflictions with the divine terror.³¹ Be that as it may, it is well registered that in the matter of elimination of the misery of poverty (*daridryaduhkham*) both Jambhala and Lakshmi bear the similar position of esteem.

On another level also Lakshmi and Jambhala bear conceptual similarity. The aquatic background of the goddess Lakshmi is well-recognized in her birth from the ocean during the time of the churning of the ocean (*samudramanthana*). Interestingly, Jambhala is repeatedly referred to as *Jalendra* or the lord of the waters.³² Of course, the lord of the waters in the Brahmanical context is Varuna, but the equation of the latter with Vishnu is known as a concept.³³ Thus the conception of Jambhala with the characteristics of Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, is quite significant.

In the *Nishpannayogavali* there is the description of a sixteen-armed form of the Buddhist deity Heruka. In each of the sixteen hands the god is described as holding a skull-cup (*kapala*). Those in the right hands show the forms of the elephant, horse, donkey, cow, camel, man, a composite animal and an owl. In the corresponding skull-cups held in the left eight hands there are the representations respectively of the divinities like Prithvi, Varuna, Vayu, Agni, Chandra, Aditya, Yama, and Dhanada.³⁴ It is apparent that the animals of the first list are deemed as related to the deities of the second list, although the relationships are highly unconventional. However, the mention of the owl (*uluka*) to correspond with Dhanada, who is same as Jambhala, the male consort of the Buddhist goddess of wealth, Vasudhara, is very striking. The identification of Vasudhara with Shree or Lakshmi is an established fact.³⁵ Thus, taking the axiomatic proposition that the relationships and concepts of male deities are relevant to their female counterparts as well,³⁶ it is possible to say that the above-mentioned relationship of deities with the animals postulated by the *Nishpannayogavali* is pertinent to the respective female counterparts. In other words, the reference bears a distinct conceptual relationship between the goddess Lakshmi and the owl or *uluka*,³⁷ as is also depicted in the iconographic tradition of eastern India, particularly that of Bengal. Abhayakaragupta drew from the iconographic convention of the association of Lakshmi with the owl, as he noticed in the Brahmanical context.³⁸ As the author of the *Nishpannayogavali*, Abhayakaragupta suggests the aforesaid association in the conception of Dhanada Jambhala,³⁹ the male version of Vasudhara-Lakshmi. In that case, the conceptual association between the owl and

the goddess Lakshmi should be quite an old tradition, perhaps going backwards to a period earlier than the twelfth century CE, the date usually accepted for the composition of the *Nishpannayogavali*.⁴⁰

In this connection, another significant point deserves mention. Jambhala, the male version of Buddhist Lakshmi, is repeatedly referred to as *Dimbakriti* or one who bears an oval/rounded form.⁴¹ It seems that this characterization is meant for an iconic or emblematic representations of Jambhala. In this respect Jambhala bears similarity to Dharma-Thakura mentioned above. The latter also is represented in the ovoid spherical form like that of a stupa.⁴² The cult of Dharma-Thakura was quite popular at the folk level, both in the Buddhist and non-Buddhist dispensations, in eastern India, as is borne out by the popular literature known as the *Dharmamangala-kavya*. We have already taken note of the fact that Dharma-Thakura traditionally is associated with the owl. It is no unlikely that this association of Dharma-Thakura was transposed on the Buddhist deity Jambhala-Dhanada, the resemblance of the form in their abstract representations being the driving force for the trail of the relationship.

It is interesting to note that the association of the owl with Dhanada-Jambhala seems quite pertinent in view of the latter's anti-serpent conceptual syndrome. That the *nagas* were subordinated by Jambhala is represented by the fact that the latter invariably used the serpents as the personal adornments.⁴³ Moreover, Jambhala usually holds in one of his hands an alligator (*nakula*) shown as showering treasures (*ratnavarshi*).⁴⁴ The *nakula* is a relentless enemy of snakes, as is also the owl. The anti-*naga* syndrome of Jambhala is put forth by Abhayakaragupta in his prescriptive note that the angry (*uchchhushma*) form of Jambhala should be conceived with a precedent visualization of snakes vomiting out the treasures that they had swallowed earlier (*nagadin gilitaratnani purato vamato dhyayadeva*).⁴⁵ Usually a *nakula* (alligator), a known enemy of snakes, delivering treasures out of its mouth is associated with Dhanada or Jambhala. Abhayakaragupta has more explicitly stated the anti-*naga* stance of Jambhala-Dhanada in the prescriptive recommendations mentioned above. Dhanada's association with the owl, another anti-*naga* creature, suggested by the same author

in his *Nishpannayogavali*, referred to earlier, is indeed a pointer to the fact that the cult of Dhanada-Jambhala perhaps had a major role to play to counter the increasing popularity of the serpent cult of Manasa in eastern India, particularly in Bengal. The popularity of the cult of Lakshmi was substantially threatened by Manasa's dominant superiority. But Vasudhara, the consort of Dhanada-Jambhala, being identified with Shree or Lakshmi, helped the cult of Lakshmi not only restore its lost prestige, but also in getting the cult serve an effective role of a devotional antidote to the menacing threat of the cult of Manasa. The owl shown in the eastern Indian images of Lakshmi is verily a metaphorically made visual commitment of the cult for an ensured safety against the dangers of snakes and of the apprehension of the wrath of the goddess Manasa, the serpent deity.

The role that the cult of Vasudhara-Shree-Lakshmi might have played in the 12th-13th century, the possible period in which Abhayakaragupta flourished, in eastern India in upholding the prospect of protection against the menace of snakes and reptiles is evidenced by an interesting image of the goddess Vasudhara from Chittagong in Bangladesh bearing an inscribed label in proto-Bengali script of the 12th century which reads : *Shree devih*.⁴⁶ The image represents the usual features of iconography of the goddess Vasudhara worshipped both in the Brahmanical and Buddhist dispensations. Significantly, in the pedestal of the image there is the representation of an alligator or iguana (*godhika* or *godha*),⁴⁷ a feature not ascribed to the iconographical prescriptions of the goddess known from the textual sources. This feature in the image cannot be ignored as a casual insertion bearing no visual meaning. This should be explained as the deliberate addition of a local concept of the goddess's intimate association with the *godha* (iguana or alligator) which is confirmed adversary of snakes and reptiles. The *godha* in this image perhaps delivers the same message of protection against serpents as is done by the depiction of the owl in the image of Lakshmi.⁴⁸ Abhayakaragupta's association of Dhanada-Jambhala, the consort of Vasudhara-Lakshmi, with the owl doubtless represents the concept of the divine protection from snakes, and the same concept is represented by the Chittagong image of Vasudhara with a *godha* at the pedestal. The image of Lakshmi with an owl as the associate should also be interpreted in

this light. The inherent historical message of an inter-cult rivalry, defense and pilferage constantly in operation should be kept in mind while dealing with iconological phenomenon of the type involved in the present case.

References & Notes

1. *Devimahatmya-Chandi*, Part III, Ch.8 verse 14.
2. Of the two wives of the sage Kashyapa, Vinata had three sons : Uluka, Aruna and Garuda, while Kadru had the Nagas as the offsprings. The stories related to the constant strife and rivalry between Vinata and Kadru, and between their offsprings, are narrated in various Puranas with occasional variations. Some of the stories are found even in the *Mahabharata*. See *Pauranika* by Amal Kumar Bandopadhyay, vols.I & II, Calcutta, 1978 and 1979, respectively. Also *Pauranika Abhidhana*, ed. by Subodh Chandra Sarkar, Calcutta, 1963.
3. This is the pivotal theme of one of the sections of the celebrated text, the *Panchatantra* written by Vishnu Shsarma sometime about the 5th cent. CE.
4. Alakshmi is also known as Jyeshtha, Kalakarni, Jara, etc. According to the second canto of the *Balacharita* of Bhasa, Alakshmi is the same as Jyeshtha. The latter has the crow as the insignia and also as the vehicle. See J.N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, p.372.
5. Although Chamunda is characterized as *pretasana* (seated or standing on a corpse), in many cases she is represented either as seated on or as accompanied by an owl. A few such images are there in the collection of Patna Museum.
6. Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of Manasa*, Calcutta, 1966; Sashibhusan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta, 1976.
7. Pradyot Kumar Maity, *op.cit.*, pp.69ff.
8. *Ibid.*, p.198.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.75, 117, 186, 187, 192, 217, 313, 319.
10. *The Vedic Age*, ed. R.C. Majumdar, London, 1957, p.115.
11. D.A. Mackenzi, *Myths of Babylonis and Assyria*, p.70.
12. Such phenomena in respect of various animals and birds, dispersed in different countries and contexts, are referred to by Asis Sen in his *Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art*, Calcutta, 1972.

13. *Bhagavat Gita*, Chapter no.2, Verse 69 :
ya nisha sarvabhutanam tasyam jagartti samyami
yasyam jagrati bhutani sa nisha pashyato muneh
14. *Nishpannayogavali*, ed. B. Bhattacharyya, Baroda, 1949, pp.12, 32, 27, 80, 90, 92.
15. *Nishpannayogavali*, p.12 has the description of Uluki not only as *ulukamukhi* (with owl's face), but also as seated on the great snake (*phanindrapiesthesu*).
16. B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Calcutta, 1958; Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, Oxford, 1928; "Five Protective Goddesses of Buddhism" by D.C. Bhattacharyya, *Aspects of Indian Art*, ed. P. Pal, Leiden, 1972.
17. Alice Getty, *op.cit.*, p.122-23.
18. D.C. Bhattacharyya, *The Iconology of Composite Images*, New Delhi, 1980, pp.36ff.
19. B.N. Mukherjee, "Vasudhara", *Vasudhara*, 4th year, vol.I, 1367 Bengali *samvat*.
20. Alice Getty, *op.cit.*, pp.122ff.
21. *Sadhanamala*, ed. B. Bhattacharyya, vol.I, p.253.
22. For detailed discussions on these aspects of these two deities, refer to Banerjea, *op.cit.*, relevant chapters on *Ganapatyas* and *Dikpalas*.
23. For various concepts of Jambhala-Dhanada-Kubera-Vaishravana, see *sadhana* Nos.284-299 of the *Sadhanamala*, vol.II.
24. The popularity of the deity is well evidenced by the mere face of the number of *sadhanas* of the deity included in the *Sadhanamala*. That as many as 16 *sadhanas* speak about the deity is a pointer to his importance and popularity.
25. *Sadhanamala*, p.595. Interestingly, in pp.597-98m of the same text it is stated that by worshipping Jambhala one can become as wealthy as the god (*jambhalasadrisho bhavati dhanakanakashmridhah*), and one's such act of devotion can make the earth full of material bounty (*prithivim dravyapurnam karoti*).
26. *Sadhanamala* p.580. Also in p.570 : *sarvasattoadaridryaduhkhachhedarthm jambhalam bhavayet* (conceive Jambhala for the elimination of the pangs of poverty of all beings); on the same page, Jambhala is characterized as the lord who fulfills the desires of all sorts (*namo' shaisyasampattida shreejambhalaya* - salutation to the venerable Jambhala, the bestower of unlimited affluence).
27. *Ibid.*, p.579. Also, in p.580 : *bahuvidhadhananivaham* (one who showers treasures of all

kinds). Interestingly, the *mantra* (core concept) of Jambhala is : *om aj jm dhanam me dehi hum* (devotion to you, give me affluence).

28. *Ibid.*, p.580.

29. *Ibid.*, p.582.

30. *Ibid.*, p.571.

31. *Ibid.*, p.570:

daridryaduhkhahatamanavanam ka chittavrittih sugatasya kritteh /

attanacha kopadiva jambhalo' sau uchchhushmarupam bhayadam chakara //.

32. Of numerous references to Jambhala either as *jalendra* or *jalesha*, mention should be made of *ibid.*, pp.564-67 and 578.

33. In the *Pratimalakshana of the Vishnudharmottara*, all the *Dikpalas*, including Varuna who is referred to in the text as *yadasampati* and as *jalesha* (both meaning the lord of waters)., have been presented as the manifestations of Vishnu. See D.C. Bhattacharyya, *Pratimalakshana of the Vishnudharmottara*, New Delhi, 1991, pp.54ff.

34. *Nishpannayogavali*, p.20 : *savyastakaraih kavalitakapalenu hastyasvakharagavostramanusyasarabholukh, vamastakarakapalesu prithviyarunavayutejaschandradityayamadhanadah*. The list of the deities is high non-conventional. It includes five of the *Dikpalas* : Varuna, Vayu, Teja (Agni), Yama and Dhanada. At the same time, Aditya, Chandra and Prithvi are added to the list, in order to make the total number of divinities as eight. Why this deviation from the conventional list of *Dikpalas* is not known. However, there cannot be any doubt regarding the deliberate mention of the animals and the deities in the corresponding order. There is no reason to doubt it. Even if the deities and the animals are to be resolved in terms of a conventionally accepted frame of relationship-reference, *Uluka* (owl) cannot be related to any other deity than Dhanada of the second list.

35. B.N. Mukherjee, *op.cit.* Also see D.C. Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Buddhist Iconography*, New Delhi, 1978, pp.22b ff.

36. Refer to note 1 above.

37. Dhanada is the consort of Vasudhara or Lakshmi. If Dhanada is related to the owl, the relationship, logically, is shared by his consort Lakshmi or Vasudhara.

38. See *Sadhanamala*, vol.II, Introduction pp.xc ff, and also the Introduction of the

Nishpannayogavali. Abhayakaragupta belonged to the Vikramshila monastery, and also flourished during the reign of Ramaphala of Bengal. Although there is no certain evidence about whether he was a resident of Bengal or of Magadha, there is hardly any doubt that he belonged to eastern India.

39. Interestingly, Abhayakaragupta composed a detailed *sadhana* of Jambhala Dhanada (*sadhana* No.295 of the *Sadhanamala*), and the *sadhana* No.293 of the same text was composed by one Kumarakaragupta. Both the *sadhana* are dedicated to the angry (*uchchhushma*) form of the divinity. In view of the similarity in their names, and because both of them style themselves as *mahapandita* (eminent scholar), a relationship between the two, not necessarily a blood relation, can perhaps be postulated. It seems likely that they belonged to the same region (eastern India) and time (circa 12th century CE). In that case, the popularity of the Jambhala cult in eastern India in the 12th century CE seems evident.
40. *Nishpannayogavali*, Introduction, p.11.
41. *Sadhanamala*, pp.569 and 574 refer to Jambhala as *dimbaroopam* (having the form of an egg), while p.570 has the reference as *dimbadeham* (one who has the body like the form of an egg). The expression might be meaning the embryonic form, i.e., child-like appearance.
42. Pradyot Kumar Maity, *op.cit.*; the *Dharmapoojavidhi* of Raghunandana, published in 1917 by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad of Calcutta describes Dharma, the deity of the Dharma cult, as *shoonyamurti* (having the form of the void) and as having no body or its attributes like arms and feet (*na cha karacharana na kayam*).
43. *Sadhanamala*, pp.569, 574, 575, 577.
44. In almost all the descriptions of Jambhala in the *Sadhanamala* ascribe this feature.
45. *Sadhanamala*, p.578.
46. B. N. Mukherjee, *East Indian Art Styles : A Study in Parallel Trends*, Calcutta, 1980, pp.41 ff.
47. *Ibid.*, plates 1 and 2.
48. Incidentally, the *godha* plays an important role in the narratives of the *Chandimangala-kavya*. Its likely association with a metaphor of an anti-*naga* syndrome vis-à-vis an anti-Manasa cult stance should not be ruled out, although it is not possible to postulate a theory based on a presumption.