

5

RECENTLY DISCOVERED BRAHMĀ AND SKANDA IMAGES FROM MORA, MATHURA

VINAY KUMAR GUPTA

Mora is a village situated to the south of Mathura city at a distance of about 12 km. Mora village became one of the most famous of Mathura sites because of epigraphic and sculptural findings dating back to 1st century BCE providing the earliest evidences of the worship of *Pañchavṛṣṇi Vīras*. Four sculptural finds in Mathura Museum (No. E20, E21, E22, E23) and a door-jamb in Lucknow Museum (No. J 526) are found from this site. The famous Morā well inscription in Mathura Museum (No. Q1) was found by Alexander Cunningham at this site (Vogel 1911-12: 127).

Image of Brahmā

Morā, from where a number of images of early centuries of Common Era have been found, becomes even more important when a complete image of Brahmā (fig. 5.1), probably the chief deity of a temple was found lying there. The deity was being worshipped as some other deity than Brahmā. Images of Brahmā are rare and as a chief deity which is a

possibility in this case, even rarer. The earlier known Brahmā images from Mathurā housed in the Mathura Museum are: Brahmā image from Saptasamudrī well (No. 382), fragment carved with two images including Brahmā (No. 2134), both belonging to Kushāṇa period, and one image of Brahmā (No. 2481) datable to Gupta period and four images of Brahmā (No. D 20, D 22, 285 and 1098) of medieval period. Most of these images have been found from a water body like a well or river Yamunā and all the early images are quite small, less than 30 cm. in height.

The image found at Morā seems belonging to late Gupta period, *circa* 6th century CE and is about 75 cm. in height. The deity has been carved on a red sandstone slab in between beautifully carved pillars and an arch decorated with lotus design. The deity is shown seated on *kamalāsana* with his legs put in comfortable pose, slightly different than the *padmāsana*. He has four hands, upper right hand is either holding a lotus bud or some triangular object. His lower right hand is holding a writing brush, as he is considered to be the *bhāgyavidhātā*. His left hands are broken and probably held either a *kamaṇḍalu* or a manuscript. He generally holds a *kamaṇḍalu* in his lower left hand but in this case as he is holding a writing brush in his lower right hand, a manuscript to write on with this brush is more probable. His upper right hand might have held a rosary. The deity is tetra cephalic but only three frontal faces are visible. He is shown with matted hair locks on all three heads. His eyes are shown half closed and the ears of the central head have been elongated. His central face had a sharp beard. He is wearing a typical *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread), beaded armlets and a beaded necklace of pearls. Below his *kamalāsana* are shown two swans carved back to back.

Haṁsa (swan) is considered to be his mount. In this sculpture the swans are holding fishes in their beaks. In between the swans was possibly shown a *ratna-pātra*. The deity is shown in niche between two pillars. These pillars are square in shape and are decorated in the style of late Gupta period with lotus medallion, floral motifs, etc. On the top of these pillars, two flying celestial damsels are shown holding a parasol like arch which is decorated as a lotus medallion, somehow reminding of the most exceptional *prabhāmaṇḍala* of the exquisite Buddha image (A 5) from Jamālpur, Mathurā. By the side of the pillars *ihāmṛga* are shown with some other hybrid form above them.

It can be safely added that this image is one of the earliest Brahmā images from the region which would have been used as a deity in a temple. All the earlier images from the Braj region are those images which would have been used for private worshipping at home and were probably immersed in water bodies as part of some ritual, as suggested by their small size and finding of most of them from ancient water bodies.

Image of Kārttikeya

One image of Kārttikeya also has been found from village Mora, now kept in the godown of Mathura Museum. This image belongs to Gupta period, *circa* 4th century CE. The treatment of the body is typical Gupta i.e. slender body with very fine drapery. The Kārttikeya image (fig. 5.2) is in standing pose with its head and arms missing. His mount, a peacock has been carved beautifully in lower part of the red sandstone sculpture. Kumāra is wearing a dhotī tied in a peculiar fashion at his waist with central knot and most of it hanging in folds and pleats on the left side of him below waist. On the upper limb, he is only partially draped, in such a way as a sacred thread is worn. The most striking characteristic of this sculpture is that it has been carved on both sides (fig. 5.3). It appears that the two of the images of the deity are indicative of their different identifications as Skanda and Kumāra. It is supportive of the fact that during Kushāṇa period the same god was conceived as different gods by varying the attributes of him by different names - Viśākha, Skanda, Kumāra and Kārttikeya. In the present sculpture because of its broken nature, the difference between the two aspects of the deity can not be analysed but it surely represents two different aspects of the same god.

This image was brought to the same museum some years back. It definitely indicate that this village was not only important for *Bhāgavatas*, whose shrine was at about 1 km. distant from the village, but there were definite shrines of other Hindu gods and goddesses like Śiva, Kārttikeya and even of Brahmā, a genuinely rare one. These features would also have continued at many other village sites but because of destruction of evidences by nature as well as humans, it is not so found. Besides a number of terracottas of Kushāṇa and later period with some devotional merits were also in vogue at the site, as the exploration at the site indicated. The village name Morā which is related to the legendary king Mōradhvaja,

also unearthing the images of Kumāra who is often related with his *vāhana* *Mayūra*, also confirms the ancient nature of village name - Morā or Mayūrapurā.

Bibliography

Vogel, J. Ph. (1911-12) *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Delhi.



Fig. 5.1. Mora: Brahmā, Gupta period



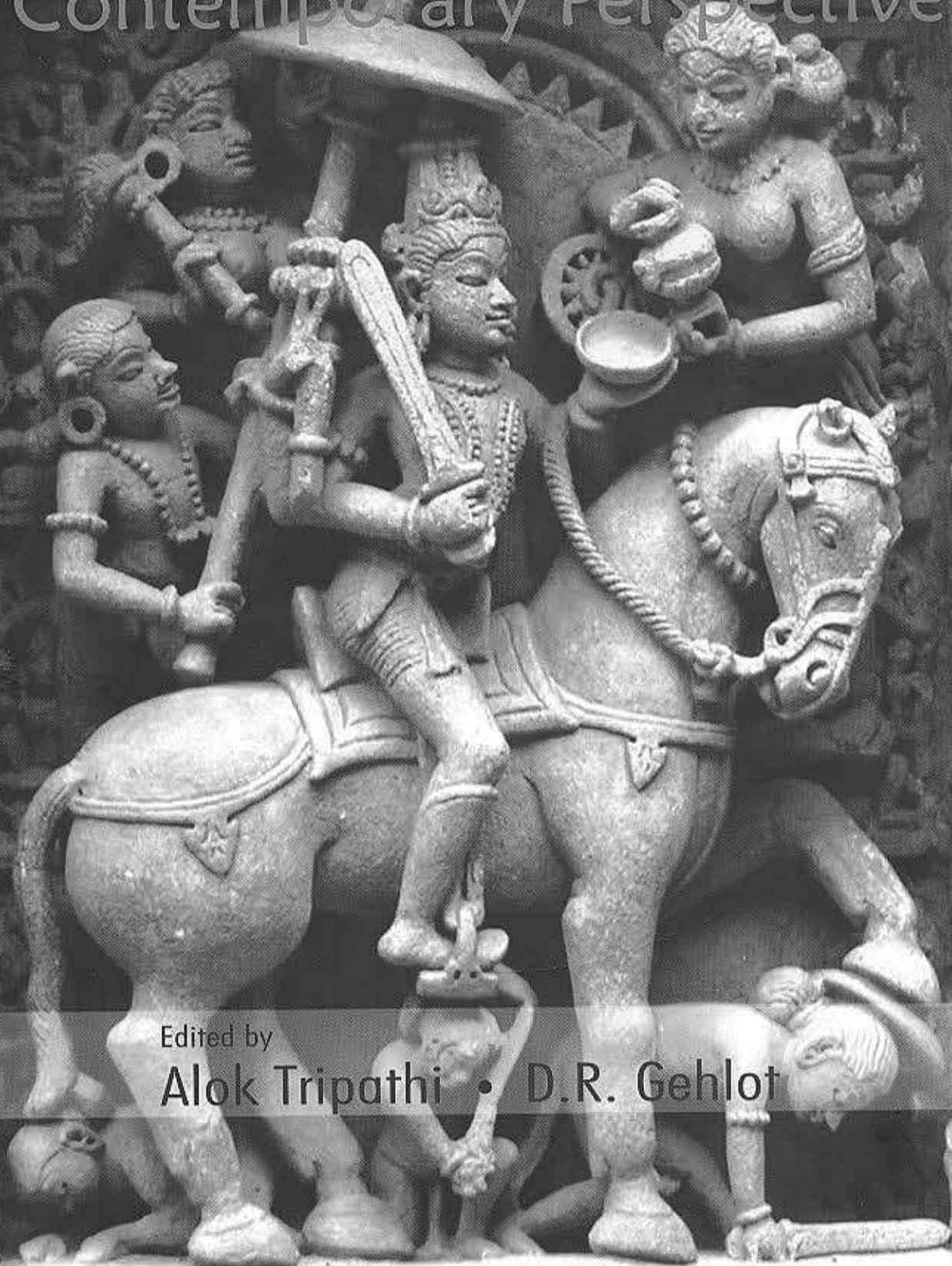
Fig. 5.2. Mora: Kārttikeya,
4th century CE, front view



Fig. 5.3. Mora: Kārttikeya,
4th century CE, back view

History of Art

Contemporary Perspectives



Edited by

Alok Tripathi • D.R. Gehlot