

EARLY HANUMĀN IMAGES IN THE ART OF MATHURA

Lord Hanumān is one of the most popular minor gods of modern India especially northern India. In a way the popularity of Hanumān as a deity in modern times takes the place of the ancient Yakṣa cult of which we get a number of evidences in the form of ancient sculptures and in ancient literature. In iconography, no confirmed representation of Hanumān is available in Indian art prior to Gupta period. In some of the reliefs like the image at Bharat Kala Bhawan (No. 165); two sculptures in Allahabad and Patna museums, Hanumān is shown along side the monkey army.¹ The earliest known sculpture of Hanumān as an independent deity has been found from the site of Gupta temple at Deogarh.² This image represents the scene of Hanumān bringing the *Saṅjivani Bṛī* as he lifts a mountain with both his hands above the head. He is wearing a necklace, a long floral garland, bangles and a crown over his head. Another early image is from Parkham village of Mathura (M.M. No. D 27, Pl. 1). In this statuette of colossal size, the god is standing with his left foot on a prostrate female figure, the head of which is lost and which from the emaciated breasts has been identified as Chāmūṇḍā by V.S. Agrawala.³ But it is very difficult to accept, that she can be goddess Chāmūṇḍā as Chāmūṇḍā is a very prominent goddess with a quite higher status among deities. At the most, this female figure might be identified as some *Pretanī* or *Bhutanī*. The left leg of the god and his right arm which is raised

above the head in the attitude of lifting the mountain containing the *Saṅjivani Bṛī*, are broken away with the top of the slab. The left hand is kept at the breast and probably holds a flower of Pārijāta as Hanumān is popularly associated with the Pārijāta tree (*Pārijāta taru mūlavāsinam*). He is wearing round necklaces and a roughly triangular shaped *grāiveyaka*. His hair has been tied in a peculiar manner as three round rings have been formed to tie the hair. He is wearing a dhoti tied at his waist and also *keyūras* are visible on his forearms. His tail is shown coming from behind his right leg rising up to shoulder height. Coomarswamy had dated this sculpture to Gupta period,⁴ but it might be actually dating to about 8th – 9th century. Early medieval date of 9th century A.D. has been suggested by Agrawala for this sculpture.⁵ This image was possibly found from the same spot from where the famous Parkham Yakṣa image was found. The finding of an early Hanumān image from the spot of the shrine of local Jakhaiya baba at village Parkham also indicates towards the transformation of the cult of Yakṣa worship to the cult of worshipping of Hanumān. Besides, at the same spot a medieval Hanumān image was observed which to be in worship inside a temple. Another similar image of Hanumān from Mathura is now housed in Indian Museum, Calcutta.⁶

New findings of Hanumān images in Braj region-

1. Broken bust and the lower portion of a Hanumān image (Pl. 2 a & b)-

Two broken portions of possibly the same image were found in worship, though as a female deity, at a shrine in village Daulatgarh of district Bharatpur. The head and the right hand of the image (Pl. 2 a) are missing. The deity is wearing a torque round the neck. He is also wearing a heavy three stringed pearl necklace. *Keyūras* are visible at the arms. His left hand has been kept near the chest and he possibly holds a fruit or flower of *Pārijāta* in it. In the lower portion (Pl. 2 b), the posture of the left leg of the deity suggests that it is slightly upraised and bent at knee and would have been kept over a female like the Mathura Muscum Hanumān image. He is wearing a dhoti tied in a peculiar manner. His long tail is visible coming down by the side of his right leg and has a kind of knot at the lower end. The lower feet of the image as well as a part of the abdomen of the image are missing. The missing right hand would have been shown in the attitude of holding the mountain containing *Saṅjivani* and three other medicines. This image might be dated to about 7th – 8th century A.D. It might be one of the earliest images of the Pavanputra Hanumān.

2. Broken bust of Hanumān image from Fatehpur Sikri (Pl. 3)-

This broken bust of Lord Hanumān was observed at the shrine of Ser Mata at the outskirts of Fatehpur Sikri on the road to Khanua. This bust is quite similar to the above mentioned bust. A torque and a three stringed necklace are visible over the chest of the deity. His broken left hand holds a similar type of object as held in the

image from Daulatgarh. His long tail has been raised towards up side and from the position of its broken right hand it appears that it held a mountain containing the medicinal plants. This image might be dated to about 8th – 9th century A.D.

3. Broken bust of Hanumān image from Jaghina, Bharatpur (Pl. 4)-

This fragmentary image was observed outside village Jaghina in district Bharatpur. The spot where this image was lying appeared to be an ancient religious spot outside the village. Kushan pottery was scattered all over the surface of this spot which is isolated from the huge habitation mound of the village. This sculptural piece also belongs to the type of the above mentioned images and has a slightly corpulent body (*Mahāvīra*). This sculpture might belong to about 9th – 11th century A.D.

4. Hanumān image at village Chursain, Hathras (Pl. 5)-

This sculpture was in worship at a temple in village Chursain of district Hathras. Though the temple belongs to a female deity, this image might be in worship as Lord Hanumān. The upraised left leg of the deity has been kept over the body of a female, possibly symbolizing the evil spirits. The left hand is kept near the waist and possibly holds a similar kind of object as is held in the above mentioned images. The right hand of the deity appears to be in a pose of lifting the mountain containing medicines which he had brought from Himalayas to cure his Lord Rāma, his brother Lakṣmaṇa and the *Vānara Senā*. This sculpture belongs to late medieval period of about 16th – 17th century A.D. and clearly indicates the difference in the

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style of representing the God during Post- Gupta/ Early medieval period and late medieval period.

Reference:

1. Bhagwan Singh, *Gupta Kalin Hindu Dev Pratimayen* (Hindi), Delhi 1982, p. 79.
2. M.S. Vats, *Memoir of A.S.I.*, No. 70, 1952, Pl. 17 c.
3. V.S. Agrawala, *A Catalogue of Brāhmanical Images in Mathura Art*, Lucknow 1951, p. 47.
4. Anand Coomarswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, New York 1927, p. 86.
5. V.S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
6. *A.S.R.*, 1926-27, p. 101, Pl. XXXV, Fig. (k).

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Pl. 1. Hanumān (M.M. No. D 27), Mathura.



Pl. 2a. Bust from Daulatgarh.



Pl. 2b. Lower part of the above image.



Pl. 3. Broken bust of Hanumān, Image, Fatehpur Sikri.



Pl. 4. Broken bust of Hanumān Image, Jaghina, Bharatpur.



Pl. 5. Hanumān image at Chursain, District Hathras.