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**Late Professor C. Mani**

**Volume- II**

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## Some Interesting New Gaṇeśa Images from Braj Region

Vinay Kumar Gupta

Gaṇeśa, Lord of the Gaṇas, is one of the most universally adored of all the Hindu Gods and his images are found across India as well as in Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Central Asia, China, Japan and many other Asian nations. Gaṇeśa's iconography developed into some uniformity by the late-Gupta period. Some of the earliest images of Gaṇeśa are from Mathura region. Besides, a few such images of late-Gupta period are also known from: Udaigiri<sup>1</sup>, Ahichchhatra<sup>2</sup>, Bhitargaon,<sup>3</sup> Deogarh<sup>4</sup> and Rajghat.

Some of the important features of these Gaṇeśa images are:

(i) The early Gaṇeśa images are fashioned without any *kirīṭa* but in late-Gupta images, some kind of head-dress was introduced while in some *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* on the head, (ii) In all the images, the trunk of the lord is turned towards the left where from he picks up his favourite sweet balls kept in a *mōdaka-pātra* which is held in his left hand, (iii) The early images are two-handed but during late-Gupta period, the four-handed images became popular, (iv) The images are found in both the *mudras* - seated as well as standing, (v) The position and attributes of the normal left hand is fixed in all these images. In his upper right hand, he generally holds a *paraśu* while in his other hands a tusk and a fruit like pomegranate or radish, (vi) Most of the early images are shown with a *sarpa-yajñopavīta*, which suggest his association with Śaivite cult and (vii) An important feature associated with Śaivite cult is the nudity of the images as well as the ithyphallic nature of many of them.

### Gaṇeśa from Kanwara

This small sculptured panel was found at a shrine in village Kanwara, situated near Kaman in district Bharatpur of Rajasthan. The plaque made of spotted red sandstone is badly defaced, especially at the top and it depicts a seated Gaṇeśa and a female deity (Pl. 22.1).

Seated like the Kushāṇ yakṣas, Gaṇeśa is possibly two-armed; his left hand is putting *mōdakas* in his trunk which is turned to the left while the right is also defaced. The body is corpulent and stout. There is perhaps a *sarpa-yajñopavīta* over his belly. He was possibly not shown nude since a few folds of *adhovastra* are visible between his legs. The head is probably devoid of any head-dress like *mukuta*, *uṣṇīśa*, etc.

The female deity to his left is seated in *bhadrāsana* with her mount lion. The face of the lion is missing but the paws and anatomical features confirm it to be a lion. The female deity possibly held a *bilva-phala* in her left hand positioned near the navel with open palms. The head and right hand of the deity are missing. The traces of wings on the back of the female deity are visible towards her left shoulder. If it is so, it should be only the second example of such a *mātrkā* image; the other being the *mātrkā* panel (M.M. No. 75.20) which shows the *mātrkā* seated in *bhadrāsana* holding a flask in her upraised hand and by her side appears Lakṣmī holding a lotus with a long stalk.

On stylistic grounds, our sculpture in discussion may be dated to late Kushāṇ - early Gupta period, i.e., about late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Since the panel might have contained not more than three figures, it cannot be a part of a *saptamātrkā* panel. In addition, Gaṇeśa is always shown to the left of the *mātrkā* panels and such representations are not found earlier than late-Gupta period. The identification of the female deity also poses a number of questions as it depicts two different aspects; first is the sitting posture of a *mātrkā* and the other, the lion, her mount. In view of these considerations, it may be the prototype of the popular Lakṣmī-Gaṇeśa plaques if the lion can be considered as the vehicle of Lakṣmī. It might be one of the earliest representations of Lord Gaṇeśa as a deity in Indian art.

### Gaṇeśa from Ghata

A lintel was found at a shrine outside the village Ghata in district Bharatpur of Rajasthan. It depicts three standing deities in niches wherein Gaṇeśa is in the central while the other two are in the left and right niches (Pl. 22.2). Two-armed Gaṇeśa has been shown dancing. In his left hand he holds a *mōdaka-pātra* from which he is holding a sweet ball with his trunk; while in his right hand a *paraśu* (battle-axe).

*Navagrahas*, interestingly 8 in number, have been sculpted in between three niches. If the two smaller half carved figures standing on both sides of central niche housing Gaṇeśa are considered as *grahas*, then the total number would be ten. The last of the *grahas* is clearly identifiable as Rāhu and it occupies comparatively much larger proportion than the others. In the left niche is perhaps goddess Chāmūṇḍā.<sup>5</sup>

A dancing figure of Gaṇeśa depicted in the central niche, perhaps indicates that this lintel might have been an architectural member of a temple dedicated to Gaṇeśa and however, this lintel may be dated to 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century CE.

### Gaṇeśa from Sandhan Khera

This broken architectural frieze containing a figure of Gaṇeśa in the middle was found at a shrine of Sandhan Khera village in district Agra of Uttar Pradesh (Pl. 22.3). The seated figure of Lord Gaṇeśa holds a *mōdaka-pātra* in his left hand from where he is picking up the sweet balls with his tusked trunk

turned towards his left. His right hand is too broken. He is wearing a beaded necklace round the neck and a beaded *yajñopavīta* in the similar way as the winged figures. The deity is wearing a peculiar cap over his head.

Gaṇeśa is surrounded on both sides by winged celestials probably holding a *kamaṇḍalu* in their left hands. These winged figures wear beaded necklace around the neck as well as a beaded *yajñopavīta*.

The image of Gaṇeśa is not represented as a cult deity but as a part of architectural arrangement where he finds a place in between some other celestials which are to be identified. Floral decorations are visible at the top of the frieze. Stylistically, this image may be dated to Gupta period about 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Yet another sculpture was also found at the same shrine mentioned above and may have been an architectural member of a Gupta temple complex (Pl. 22.4). The image is badly defaced yet the sculptural reliefs manifest two deities.

The male deity is shown in a seated posture to the left of the standing female deity. It has slightly stout and corpulent body. His *vāhana*, probably a rat, is visible at the base of the panel behind his right leg. The possible trunk of the deity appears to be turned to his left side. The female deity perhaps holds a pot of prosperity in her left hand. The image is too mutilated to know the number of her hands and attributes she carries although their number would have been four.

If the male deity is taken to represent Gaṇeśa and the standing female deity holding a pot of prosperity as Lakṣmī, then these figures might be one of the earliest representations of its type in Indian art. A similar image from Tantai of 6<sup>th</sup> century CE has been described by Yadav.<sup>6</sup> In fact, this is the only other sculpture of this type found till now and our sculpture might be slightly earlier than the Tantai image.

#### Gaṇeśa from Chauma

This sculptural relief, perhaps an architectural member of a temple was found in a shrine at village Chauma Shahpur in district Agra of Uttar Pradesh and it depicts three dancing Gaṇas including Gaṇeśa (Pl. 22.5).

The two-armed dancing Gaṇeśa is holding a *mōdaka-pātra* in his left hand from which he is picking the sweet balls with his trunk. He is perhaps also holding another object in his left hand. The head-dress of the deity is plain except for a band on the forehead.

Gaṇas are shown engaged in dancing and playing musical instruments. The instrument held in the hand of the central figure is a *dholaka* (drum). It appears that this relief is a part of a larger theme of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī. But it is interesting to note that their son is also shown dancing in such a theme. This sculptural representation in relief may date back to about 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

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Pl. 22.1. Kanwara: Panel depicting Ganesha and female deity



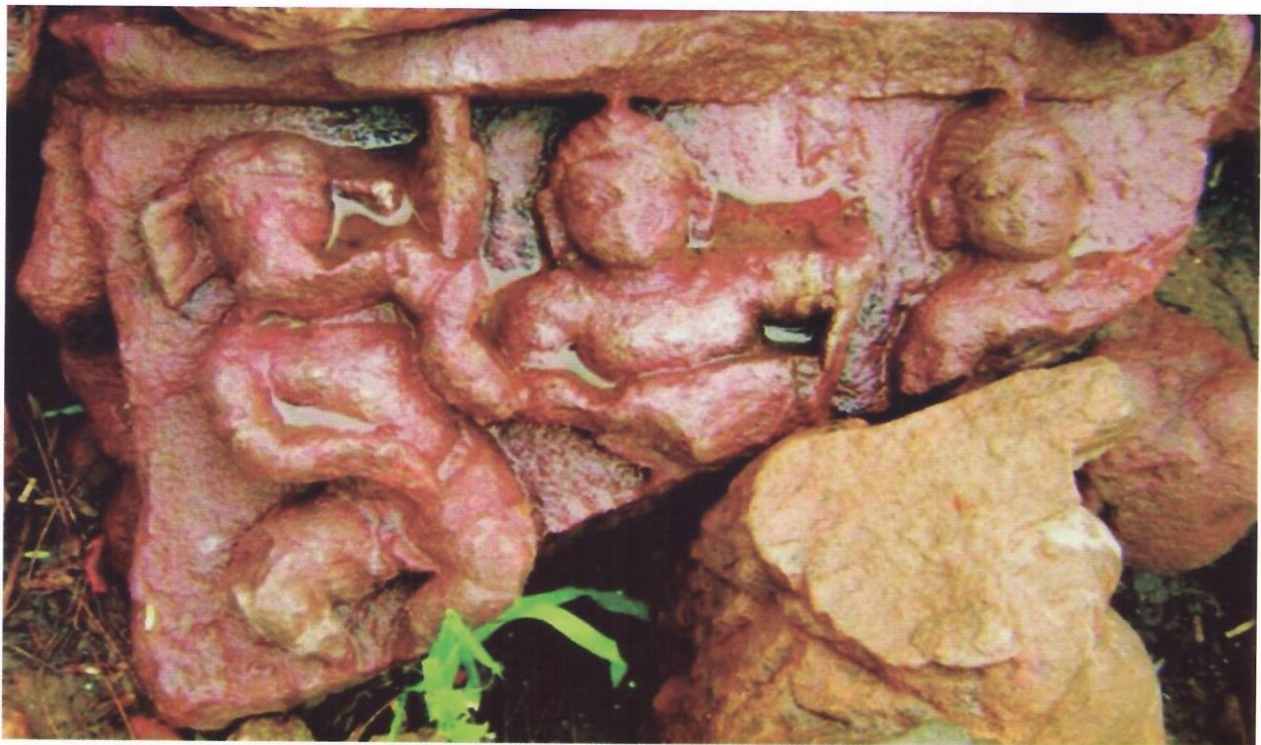
Pl. 22.2. Ghata: Lintel depicting Gaṇeśa



Pl. 22.3. Sandhan Khera: Architectural frieze depicting Gaṇeśa



Pl. 22.4. Sandhan Khera: Male deity (Ganesa?) and female deity (Lakshmi?)



Pl. 22.5. Chauma: Dancing Gaṇeśa

### Temple lintel with Gaṇeśa (Pl. 22.2) –

This temple lintel was found at a shrine outside village Ghata of district Bharatpur. The lintel depicts three deities, all standing, in the left, right corners and in the centre inside separate niches. *Navagrahas* have been carved over the lintel. The last of the *Grahas* are clearly identifiable as Rāhu and Ketu and these occupy comparatively much larger proportion than the others. In the centre of the lintel (5 *grahas* to the left and 4 to the right), a dancing figure of Lord Gaṇeśa has been carved inside a niche. It possibly indicates that this lintel might be part of a temple chamber dedicated to Lord Gaṇeśa. Gaṇeśa has been shown in a pose of dancing and has two hands. In his left hand he holds a *modaka-pātra* as usual from which he is holding a sweet ball with his trunk; while in his right hand he is holding a *paraśu* (battle-axe). In the left niche, there is a possibility that goddess Chāmuṇḍā has been represented. This lintel which is in a good state of preservation might date to circa 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.