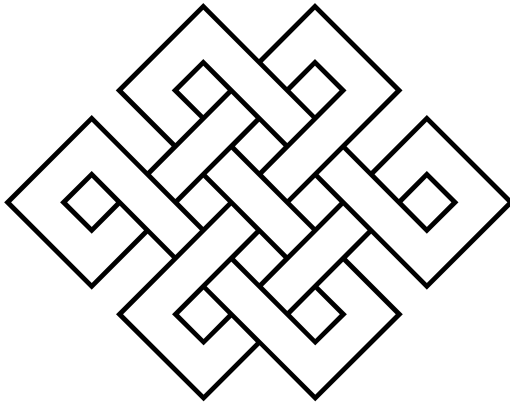


Berliner Indologische Studien Berlin Indological Studies

gegründet von / founded by
Klaus Bruhn

21 · 2013

herausgegeben von / edited by
Gerd J.R. Mevissen



WEIDLER Buchverlag

Śrī/Lakṣmī and Her Association with Other Deities in Early Indian Art

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*Kalyāṇayai praṇatā vṛddhayai siddhayai kurmo namo namaḥ |
Naiṛṭayai bhūbhṛtām lakṣmai sarvāṇayai te namo namaḥ ||*

(We bow to her who is welfare; we make salutations to her who is prosperity and success. Salutation to the consort of Śiva who is herself the good fortune as well as misfortune of kings.)

(*Devī Māhātmya*, 5.11)

Śrī/Lakṣmī is one of the most popular goddesses of ancient India. In the *Khilabhāga* of the *Ṛgveda* (at the end of the fifth *maṇḍala*) Śrī as a goddess is mentioned in the famous *Śrīsūkta* (AGRAWALA 1977: 95). In the *sūkta*, Śrīdevī is called as Mātā, Kṣmā/Pṛthivī and Śrī (*devīm mātaraṃ Śriyaṃ*). She is the progenitor of all animals and grains (*paśunām rūpamannasya mayi Śrīḥ śrayatām yaśaḥ*). She is wife of Viṣṇu and is Kṣamā Devī and Mādhavī (*Viṣṇupatniṃ kṣamām devīm mādhavīm mādhavapriyaṃ*; *Śrīsūkta* 5.87.25). In verse 6, Śrī is supposed to have created the Bilva tree (later on essentially associated with her) and in verse 7, Śrī is associated with Kubera (*devasabhā*), Maṇibhadra and Kīrti (PARTHASARATHY 2009: 48-50). Since ancient times this goddess is well associated with the lotus and hence has been called *padme sthitā*, *padmālinīm puṣkarīṇīm*, *adbhayaḥ padmasambhavā*, etc. (AGRAWALA 1977: 95). She is also called Kamalā in the *Śalya Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* (46.3.30) and in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (178. 66-72), Śarīriṇi Padmarūpa-Śrī in the *Mahābhārata* (*Āraṇyakaparva*, 218.3), Padmakarā in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (178.66-72), Paṅkajā and Cañcalā in the *Agni Purāṇa* (299.49-50) and Padma-Śrī in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (*Ayodhyākāṇḍa* 79.14). A very important characteristic of Śrī/Lakṣmī is described in the *Śrīsūkta* in the phrase '*ādram karīṇīm*', i.e., being lustrated by elephants. The *Yajurveda* (31.22) mentions that Śrī and



Fig. 1 Śrī/Lakṣmī from Palikhera (MM 15.985). Photo: author, courtesy of MM



Fig. 2 Śrī/Lakṣmī from Salempur (MM 728). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 3 Śrī/Lakṣmī from Palikhera (MM 878). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 4 Śrī/Lakṣmī from Palikhera (MM 1014). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 5 Śrī/Lakṣmī from Vrindavan (MM D17). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 7 Vasudhārā from Mathura district (MM). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 6 Vasudhārā from Bajna (MM 1411). Photo courtesy of AIIS

Lakṣmī are the wives of Viṣṇu (*Śrīśca te Lakṣmīśca te patnyoh*). The *Sabhāparva* (11.40) of the *Mahābhārata* mentions both Śrī and Lakṣmī being present in the assembly of Brahmā. A *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* narrative (XI. 4.3.1-20, SRINIVASAN in press) attributes to Śrī/Lakṣmī the power of *rājya* (sovereignty) and *kṣatra* (kingship). AGRAWALA has quite emphatically reiterated Lakṣmī being the wife of Viṣṇu. There is not much information available about the separate existence of Śrī and Lakṣmī and both are taken to be the same deity and that's why either of the two is mentioned only as Śrī/Lakṣmī or as Śrī-Lakṣmī. One difference which was recently suggested to me as a possibility by Dr. N.P. JOSHI is that the deity shown as being lustrated by elephants might be Lakṣmī who appeared during the *samudra-manthana* and was lustrated by a number of elephants whereas the other female deity holding a lotus might be taken as the goddess Śrī. The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (1.47-48, pp. 65-67) which forms a part of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* mentions Śrī/Lakṣmī as an important deity and confirms her being the wife of Viṣṇu in the following hymns:

Gandhadvārāṃ durādharṣāṃ nityapuṣtāṃ karīṣiṇī |
Īśvarī sarvabhutānāṃ tāmihopahvaye śriyaṃ ||
Oṃ bhūrlakṣmīḥ bhuvarylakṣmīḥ suvaḥ kālakarṇī, tanno mahālakṣmīḥ
prachodayāt |

I invoke in this act of worship Śrī, the support of all, who is known through smell, who is unassailable, perpetually prosperous, rich in cow-dung and the mistress of all created being.

Śrīrme bhajatu, alakṣmīrme naśyatu |
Viṣṇumukhā vai devāśchandobhirimaṃllokānanapajayyamabhajayan ||

May Śrī favour me. May Alakṣmī connected with me and mine be destroyed. The gods having Viṣṇu for their chief (who is the perpetual abode of Śrī) by the help of the *Vedas* won these three worlds for themselves free from the fear of enemies.

In sculptural art, during the Mauryan period (might be pre-Mauryan as well), Śrī/Lakṣmī as an independent standing deity is found depicted on a number of ring-stones found from various important sites like Mathura, Kosam, Patna, Basarh and Taxila. Although, the deity represented seems to be more related with the mother earth (*Mahīmātā*) aspect, her similarity with later Śrī/Lakṣmī



Fig. 8 *Vasudhārā* from Yamuna Bank (MM 1695). Photo: author, courtesy of MM



Fig. 9 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* from Palikhera (MM 871). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 10 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* from Ganeshra (MM 49.4777). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 11 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* from Mathura district (MMF.26). Photo: author, courtesy of MM



Fig. 12 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* from Mathura district (MM). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 13 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* from Mathura district (MM 80.2). Photo: author, courtesy of MM



Fig. 14 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* fragment from Shitla Ghati, Mathura (MM 2660). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 15 *Śrī/Lakṣmī* possibly from Mathura (PM). Photo courtesy of AIIS

figures and the textual overlapping in the concept of both the goddesses give a lending support in identifying the deity as Śrī/Lakṣmī. Similar figures on golden foil belonging to the same period have also been found from the sites of Piprahwa and Lauriya Nandangarh. During the Śuṅga period, her worship was quite prevalent as there are a number of sculptures available from various sites. From Bharhut, a Śrī/Lakṣmī relief with an inscription mentioning it as ‘*Śrīmādevatā*’ was found. During the Kuṣāṇa period, a large number of Śrī/Lakṣmī images are known, particularly from the Mathura region. These represent her either as sitting or standing independently or in a group of two or more deities. Some examples of standing Śrī/Lakṣmī as an independent deity are: MM nos. 15.985 (from Palikhera, **Fig. 1**), 728 (from Salempur, **Fig. 2**), 878 (from Palikhera, **Fig. 3**), 1014 (from Palikhera, **Fig. 4**), D17 (from Vrindavan, **Fig. 5**), etc. Some sculptures where the goddess holds a lotus parasol, e.g. MM nos. 1411 from Bajna (**Fig. 6**) and another image (**Fig. 7**), 1695 from the Yamuna bank (**Fig. 8**), etc., which are identified as Vasudhārā, also represent an aspect of Devī Śrī/Lakṣmī. Independently seated images of Devī Śrī/Lakṣmī may be enumerated as following: MM nos. 871 (from Palikhera, **Fig. 9**), 49.4777 from Ganeshra (**Fig. 10**), F.26 (**Fig. 11**), another image (**Fig. 12**), 80.2 (**Fig. 13**) and LM no. O.210.

In all these images, she is shown seated in *utkuṭikāsana* (sometimes also referred to as *bhadrāsana*) like a divine mother, holds a lotus flower in her



Fig. 16 Śrī/Lakṣmī from the North-west having a cornucopia in hand. After MAHESHWARI 2009: 55, pl. 29

left hand while her right hand is held in *abhaya mudrā*. Besides, there are two other *abhiṣeka*-Lakṣmī images from Mathura, one from Shitala Ghati which is the largest image of Śrī/Lakṣmī of the period (MM no. 2660, **Fig. 14**) and the other one in the Patna Museum (**Fig. 15**), where because of the broken nature it is not possible to identify the deity's position as either seated or standing. Because of being deities related with prosperity and good luck, in the north-western region many aspects of the three goddesses Śrī/Lakṣmī, Ardoxsho and Nanā are found merged in some of the reliefs.¹ Therefore Śrī/Lakṣmī is sometimes shown having a cornucopia in her left hand (**Fig. 16**). In many examples a lion is found as the mount of Śrī/Lakṣmī which might in fact be an indigenous development, but most of the scholars associate it as an adoption from the iconography of Nanā. For

the north-western region where such adoptions were common, one can accept it, but for north India (especially Mathura), there is very less scope of it since Nanā herself is not found in Mathura art except for few representations on Kuṣāṇa coins. Mathura artists had no requirement to imitate it from the North-west. But for either substantiating or declining such views much more work is needed to be done, especially on the antiquity of Durgā as a deity in India and her early icons.

Śrī/Lakṣmī forming part of *Mātrkā* groups

Most of the seated figures of Śrī/Lakṣmī are symbolic of the birth-giving posture as suggested by SRINIVASAN (2010: 86-88; 2011) and are thus related with the *mātrkā* cult, but there is only one Kuṣāṇa sculpture (MM no. F.26, **Fig. 11**) in which a child is shown with her in a cradle. She belongs to a few

¹ For a better understanding of the goddess cult in the North-west, one may refer to MUKHERJEE (1969), GHOSE (2006) and SRINIVASAN (2010; and in press).

mātrkā panels from Mathura of the Kuṣāṇa period, though in later periods, as either Lakṣmī or Vaiṣṇavī (wife of Viṣṇu), she is almost essentially represented in *sapta/aṣṭa-mātrkā* panels. In a Kuṣāṇa panel (MM no. 75.20), Lakṣmī holding a lotus is shown seated by the side of a *mātrkā* having wings and holding an object resembling a flask (JOSHI 1986: 9, pl. 36). In another broken Kuṣāṇa panel from Peepalwala Kuan, Mathura (MM no. 14.410, **Fig. 17**), the first figure is of Lakṣmī holding a lotus in her left hand and a flask in her right hand. JOSHI (1986: 12; 1987: 161) believes that the flask held in the hand of various *mātrkā*s is a wine-flask, but it seems very strange to think of a mother goddess to be linked with wine in any way and that too while holding a child. Either she should be a demonic *mātrkā* in all her aspects or should be a fully benevolent one like the popular Lakṣmī or other *mātrkā*s. The object identified as a flask might be the same but the liquid inside it might be nectar or some drink associated with children and not wine. In Gandhāran art, Hārītī is frequently represented with a flask and that sometimes too in association with children, but the basic difference is that in Gandhāra the identity of Hārītī is also dependent on Pañcika/Kubera who holds a wine-flask, while Lakṣmī's association with a wine-flask seems slightly problematic as she has her own cult which is very popular.



Fig. 17 Śrī/Lakṣmī forming part of a *Mātrkā* group, from Peepalwala Kuan, Mathura (MM 14.410). Photo courtesy of AIIS



Fig. 18 Sculptural relief with four deities (MM 34.2520). Photo: author, courtesy of MM

Kauśikī as a four-handed goddess is mentioned in the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* (47.40) as having two weapons, a trident and a sword, as well as a cup full of wine and a lotus in her hands. So, there is also a possibility of identifying the first figure in this panel (**Fig. 17**) as Kauśikī instead of Lakṣmī. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (2.4.17) mentions temples of Śrī and Madirā along with various other deities in the centre of a city. It indicates that both the deities were quite popular during the time of the composition of the *Arthaśāstra* (3rd-1st century BCE) and that the deity holding a wine-cup might be identified as Madirā in close association with Śrī. Still, more research is needed to be done before identifying every early goddess figure holding a lotus as Śrī /Lakṣmī.

Relief Depicting Śrī/Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu

This sculptural relief (MM no. 34.2520, **Fig. 18**) is the earliest and the only extant Kuṣāṇa example showing Viṣṇu and Śrī/Lakṣmī together. Although there are two other important deities in the panel, the central and the more prominent positions are occupied by these two deities. Viṣṇu is represented to the right of Śrī/Lakṣmī, here indicating that he is the husband of the latter. *Sthānaka* Viṣṇu (the only deity in *caturbhuja* form in the panel) holds *gadā* in his upper right hand, *cakra* in upper left hand and *śaṅkha* in his normal left

hand whereas his normal right hand is in *abhayamudrā*. Śrī/Lakṣmī in *sthānaka* form is shown being lustrated by two elephants with upturned pots. Her left hand holds a lotus whereas her right hand is in *abhayamudrā*. Two mutilated objects (possibly vases) are visible on either side of her feet. The deity standing to the extreme right is Ardhanārīśvara and to the extreme left is Kārttikeya. Both of them have their right hand in *abhayamudrā*. The object held in the left hand of Ardhanārīśvara is indistinct whereas Kārttikeya holds a spear. Most of the scholars have wrongly identified the loop of drapery in Kārttikeya's hand as a purse and thus have identified the figure as Kubera which does not seem to be the case. Because of this wrong identification of Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Kubera, this important relief has not been seen in the true light of its importance. In the art of Mathura, Kubera is not represented holding a spear whereas in Gandhāran art, it is very common. Viṣṇu's association with Śrī/Lakṣmī in this panel is very significant and these two deities must be regarded as a couple. Another fact is that these four deities do not belong to the less prominent deities (*laukika devatās*), but rather to the deities who are given the highest positions among the pantheon of gods (*pāralaukika devatās*), whether it is Ardhanārīśvara or Viṣṇu or even Skanda-Kārttikeya to some extent. Śrī/Lakṣmī as a form of the supreme goddess (Durgā) attains the same position but for begetting wealth and prosperity she is worshipped as a *laukika devatā* (*devī*). So, being the consort of the highest *pāralaukika* god Viṣṇu justifies her position in this tetrad and also because Śrī/Lakṣmī, strongly associated with the lotus, *pūrṇa-ghaṭa* and water, is also a sustainer of life like Viṣṇu.

Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Kubera

There are a number of sculptures from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards where Lakṣmī is found in association with Kubera. Two such significant sculptures are MM no. C.30 (**Fig. 19**) and LM no. O.241 (**Fig. 20**). In the first panel, goddess Śrī/Lakṣmī is shown seated in the centre of the relief in the manner of a *mātrkā*, holding a lotus in her left hand while her right hand shows *abhaya*. To her right is Kubera in a similar seated position holding a wine-cup in his left hand and some indistinct object in his right hand. To her left is another seated female deity holding a flask in her left hand while her right hand is in *abhaya* pose. Four children are visible on the pedestal and the extreme left corner of the panel. The other relief from Mathura (**Fig. 20**) depicts four



Fig. 19 Sculptural relief from Mathura (MM C.30). Photo: author, courtesy of MM

seated deities in a similar pose. To the extreme right is shown Śrī/Lakṣmī holding a lotus in her left hand. The right hand of all the four deities is held in *abhaya* pose. To the extreme left is Kubera holding a wine-cup in his left hand. In between Śrī/Lakṣmī and Kubera are two female deities (*mātṛkās*), one of whom (by the side of Kubera) holds a child in a cradle. The object held in the left hand of the deity seated by the side of Śrī/Lakṣmī is indistinct. All the three female deities are wearing typical Kuṣāṇa canopies, but not Kubera.

The appearance of Kubera in *mātṛkā* panels poses some questions since there is no textual reference associating Kubera with *mātṛkās*. He is, however, sometimes associated with Lakṣmī, and some textual references are available for that. One such association is mentioned in the *Śrīsūkta*. The *Mahābhārata* (I.198.6; III.140.7; V.115.9) refers to Riddhi and Bhadrā as wives of Kubera (MISRA 1981: 62). Both are somehow considered aspects of Śrī/Lakṣmī. The *Nārada Purāṇa* considers Śrī as the consort of Kubera. The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* couples Kuvera, Lakṣmī and Nidhi together while referring to a particular penance (*Kimicchika*). The *Sādhnamālā*, a Buddhist text, describes that Lakṣmī fanned Krodhamūrtis of Jambhala with a *cāmara*.

The *Karpūracarita Bhāṇa* (of Vatsarāja) mentions Maṇibhadra Yakṣa as *vallabha* (consort) of Lakṣmī (MISRA 1981: 62, 72 & 82).

Scholar even as great as V.S. AGRAWALA, who not even once mentioned Kubera in association with Śrī/Lakṣmī in the description of the goddess in his book *Bhāratiya Kalā* (1977: 95-96), but did so in the description of images in the *Catalogue of Mathura Museum* (1951: 81, 89), considers Lakṣmī as the consort of Kubera. Here one point needs to be kept in mind: Kubera is always a *laukika devatā* and not the supreme god whereas Lakṣmī as the goddess Mahā-Lakṣmī or even as a *mātṛkā* is a *pāralaukika devatā*. In the above-cited references, none is confirmatory of the identification of Lakṣmī as Kubera's or any other Yakṣa's wife. It is only an aspect of the goddess as the deity of wealth and prosperity which is being talked about in these, in the same manner as in a Gupta inscription, a Gupta king is said to have been married to Śrī/Lakṣmī. In all the reliefs in which Kubera is present along with Gaṇeśa and Śrī/Lakṣmī, it is always the case that Śrī/Lakṣmī is the prominent deity and the other two play the second fiddle. Even in most of the Mathura reliefs of Kubera in association with Lakṣmī (or even other *mātṛkās*), the right position is occupied by the female deity and Kubera is shown to the left of her. In Indian tradition, it is almost a rule that the more important deity occupies the right-side position. So, in such positions Kubera cannot be taken as the husband of Śrī/Lakṣmī but rather as a less prominent deity in comparison to Śrī/Lakṣmī or the *mātṛkās*. All those sculptures where Kubera is shown to the



Fig. 20 Sculptural relief from Mathura (LM O.241). After MAHESHWARI 2009: 47, pl. 21



Fig. 21 Śrī/Lakṣmī and Kubera from Saundh, Palwal, Haryana. Photo: author

right side of a female deity holding a lotus, Kubera should be considered as the husband of such a lesser important goddess, who represents an aspect of Śrī/Lakṣmī, like Riddhi, Siddhi, etc. A sculptural relief (**Fig. 21**), newly discovered by me from Saundh village (in *tehsil* Hodal, District Palwal, Haryana), also supports such presumptions. In this relief belonging to the post-Gupta period, goddess Śrī/Lakṣmī is shown seated to the right of the god of wealth and occupies more space than Kubera. She has more attendants in comparison to Kubera and is being lustrated by two elephants. Similar reliefs, both prior to it as well as later ones, testify to the concept of a triad where Gaṇeśa is added to the right of Śrī/Lakṣmī.

Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Gaṇeśa

In the modern Indian religious tradition Śrī/Lakṣmī and Gaṇeśa form a very popular combination, especially for being worshipped on the occasion of the most popular of Indian festivals, Dīpāvalī. No early image representing these two deities together was known prior to my discovery of an image from Kanawara in District Bharatpur (**Fig. 22**). The panel depicts two deities in high relief seated close to each other and it appears that the sculpture would not have contained more than two figures, as the broken edges suggest. The male

deity is seated in *ardhaparyāṅkāśna/mahārājālāsana* to the right of the female deity and has an elephant's head as face. It seems that the deity is two-handed. In his left hand, he holds a *modaka-pātra* from which he is picking *modakas* with the help of his trunk turned towards his left. He has only one tusk (*ekadanta*) which is missing except for its mark which is visible as a buff spot. What the deity holds in his right hand is not clear since it is too mutilated, but on the basis of other contemporary images of the deity, who is certainly Gaṇeśa, it might be identified either as a tusk or a fruit (pomegranate). The body of the deity is corpulent and stout. A *nāga-yajñopavīta* is running down from the left shoulder and is tied at his protuberant belly in a peculiar manner with the snake having many curves (similar to an *udarabandha* in appearance). He is possibly not shown nude (ithyphallic) as a part of the folds of the *dhotī* is visible between his legs. The head is probably plain and devoid of any peculiar headdress like a *muḥṭa* or *uṣṇīṣa*.

The female deity to his left is seated in *bhadrāsana/utkuṭikāsana* on her lion mount. The face of the lion is missing but the paws, remnants of the mane and the shape of the body confirm the identification of the animal. It seems that she is also two-handed. It is quite difficult to identify the object held in her left hand which is positioned near the navel with open palm. The possibility of a child sitting on the palm is negated as no legs of a child are visible hanging below the palm, nor are there any other indications of a child in the mutilated image. So, the open palm might have held some round object



Fig. 22 Śrī/Lakṣmī and Gaṇeśa from Kanawara, Bharatpur, Rajasthan. Photo: author



Fig. 23 Side view of Fig. 22

like a *mātulaṅga* or *bilvaphala* (*śrīphala*).² The head and the right hand of the deity are missing, but it is possible that in her right hand she holds a lotus flower in profile. Also possible is the presence of wings on the back of the female deity as indicated by the bulge near the left shoulder (**Fig. 23**). If the bulge is not of a wing since it is not traceable on the right side of the deity, then the only possibility is that the deity is actually four-handed. After a detailed analysis, this panel has been taken as representing Śrī/Lakṣmī and Gaṇeśa.³ There is no literary tradition in India (except Tāntric) which considers Śrī/Lakṣmī as the wife of Gaṇeśa. Important information is obtained from the *Saundarya-Laharī* of Ādi Śaṅkara where he talks of Gaṇeśa as a celibate god. The reference is as follows:

pibantau tau yasmā-davidita-vadhūsaṅga-rasikau |
kumārāvadyāpi dviradavadana-krauñcadalanau ||

For, it is by drinking their contents that Thy two sons, the mountain-piercing Kumāra and the elephant-headed Vināyaka, have remained young boys (celibates) without knowing women, to this day.

(*Saundarya-Laharī*, 73)

If Gaṇeśa in popular Brāhmaṇism would have been considered as the husband of Śrī/Lakṣmī, then Ādi Śaṅkara in the eighth century could not have mentioned him as a celibate god. It is to be kept in mind that by that time many sculptures of Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera were in veneration.

Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Kubera and Gaṇeśa

There is one interesting sculptural relief from the Mathura region (NM no. 68.113, **Fig. 24**) which represents three seated deities, Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera, datable to *circa* the 6th-7th century. In this relief prominence is given to Śrī/Lakṣmī confirming her higher status than the two gods. Another broken relief of about the same period (MM no. 223, **Fig. 25**) represents the same deities in a similar manner, though in it Gaṇeśa's figure is missing because of mutilation. Another similar image (MM no. 1119, **Fig. 26**) of about the same period repeats the same theme. In all these images, the position of the

2 A similar fruit (*śrīphala*) in the left hand of a deity in an almost similar pose is observed in an image of Gaja-Lakṣmī from Indragarh, Mandasaur, datable to *ca.* the 8th century AD (see WILLIS 1997: pl. 15).

3 For a detailed analysis refer to SRINIVASAN/GUPTA (2013) and GUPTA (2013).



Fig. 24 Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera from Mathura (NM 68.113). Photo courtesy of NM



Fig. 25 Fragment of Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera from Mathura (MM 223). Photo courtesy of ASI



Fig. 26 Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera from Mathura (MM 1119). Photo: author, courtesy of MM

deities remains constant and Śrī/Lakṣmī is being lustrated by two elephants, which is symbolic of royalty, bestowal of good fortune and sovereignty. The two other deities are also related with the boon of wealth and prosperity. A beautiful Gupta-period terracotta relief representing these three deities, now in the Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, has been published by BHATTACHARYA (1996: fig. 1) which again shows Śrī/Lakṣmī in the centre, in a more prominent position than the others. This terracotta relief might be the earliest known representation of these three deities together. BHATTACHARYA rightly calls such reliefs ‘the trio of prosperity’. AGRAWALA (1955-56: pl. LIV, fig. 5) brought to light a beautiful 9th-century relief from Abaneri, Rajasthan, now in the Amber Museum, Jaipur, representing these three deities in a similar manner. BHATTACHARYA (1996: figs. 3 and 7) has published two more such medieval reliefs from western Sale Catalogues of Eskenazi and Sotheby’s. Another bronze image of the 11th century from Bengal, now in the British Museum, London, has been published by BHATTACHARYA (1996: fig. 2) which shows a seated Śrī/Lakṣmī as the chief deity and a small subordinate figure of Gaṇeśa to her right, while the subordinate figure to her left is now missing. In all probability the missing figure was of Kubera as indicated by the small treasure pot (*nidhi*) that still remains attached to the lotus seat.

The State Archaeological Museum West Bengal, Kolkata, houses a bronze image (Fig. 27) representing seated figures of Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī(?)-Kubera(?) in the same order as usually found, but here the lustrating elephants are missing over Śrī/Lakṣmī’s head and she is not holding a lotus but a round fruit (*bilvaphala*) with both her hands. Gaṇeśa is shown four-armed, putting his right leg on a mouse, and Kubera(?) is two-armed and bearded, holding a round object in his left hand and some indistinct object in his right hand, and putting his right foot on some indistinct object. A full vase is shown below Śrī/Lakṣmī’s figure in the centre of the pedestal.

Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa

A rare relief of Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa was reported from Amjhara in Dungarpur district of Rajasthan, but unfortunately without a photograph (AGRAWALA 1959). The relief (ht. 89 cm, width 71 cm) was being worshipped as Karela Mātā (Hārītī) and belongs to the 8th-9th century CE. The relief depicts four-armed figures of Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa as attendants appearing below the left and right knees of Śrī/Lakṣmī who holds a



Fig. 27 Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī(?)-Kubera(?) from Gangarampur, South Dinajpur, West Bengal (SAMWB 00.130). Photo: Gerd Mevissen, courtesy of SAMWB

lotus flower in the raised right hand and probably a fruit (*bilvaphala* or *śrī-phala*) in the left hand placed on her left thigh. Śrī/Lakṣmī is being lustrated by two elephants. The small figure of Baladeva holds mace and plough in his upper hands while the lower hands are kept on his thighs. Similarly the small figure of Kṛṣṇa holds mace and disc in his upper hands while his lower hands are kept on his thighs. In Vṛṣṇi triad Saṃkarṣaṇa/Balarāma, Ekānaṃśā and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa are represented standing side by side since the Kuṣāṇa period, but in none of such reliefs the two male deities are relegated to the attendant's position. The Amjhara relief is unique since Ekānaṃśā is replaced by Śrī/Lakṣmī and the status of the two male divinities has been turned to subordination. How the cults of Ekānaṃśā and Śrī/Lakṣmī were merged, is a subject of further research.



Fig. 28 *Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Sarasvatī from Bengal (IM).*
Photo: Gudrun Melzer, courtesy of IM

Śrī/Lakṣmī in association with Gaṇeśa and Sarasvatī

This trio forms one of the most popular themes of Hindu calendar art and is specifically worshipped on the Dīpāvalī day. In sculptural art, no early representation of these three deities shown together is found. A small terracotta plaque representing this trio has been brought to my notice by Gerd Mevisen. It is kept in the Indian Museum, Kolkata (**Fig. 28**), depicting the trio just like Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Kubera trios, but here the position of Kubera is occupied by the goddess Sarasvatī. The two-handed central figure of Śrī/Lakṣmī is seated in *padmāsana* on a lotus seat with her right hand in *varada mudrā*. Remnants of what might have been a lustrating elephant are preserved on the upper right backslab while the corresponding one is broken away. Behind her are shown lotus creepers from which a lotus flower is coming out on either

side. Gaṇeśa and Sarasvatī are shown as subordinate deities. Gaṇeśa is four-handed while Sarasvatī holds a *vīṇā* in her two hands. All three deities are shown with halos and Gaṇeśa and Sarasvatī are also shown seated on some kind of stool but different from a lotus seat. To my knowledge it is the only known representation of Gaṇeśa-Śrī/Lakṣmī-Sarasvatī together in medieval sculptural art.

After all this analysis, we can be sure of the fact that goddess Śrī/Lakṣmī enjoys a wide popularity as an independent goddess as well as in groups, with both female and male deities. Her association with Viṣṇu, Kubera and Gaṇeśa finds more popularity but scholars need to work more on various aspects of this goddess before calling her the consort of either Kubera or Gaṇeśa. On a confirmed basis, she can be considered the wife of Viṣṇu only.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIIS	-	American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon
ASI	-	Achaeological Survey of India, New Delhi
IM	-	Indian Museum, Kolkata
LM	-	Lucknow Museum
MM	-	Mathura Museum
NM	-	National Museum, New Delhi
PM	-	Patna Museum
SAMWB	-	State Archaeological Museum West Bengal, Kolkata

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