

VINAYAKI: A HASTI-MUKH GODDESS

A Female Form of GAṆAPATĪ GAṆEŚĀ

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Abstract: Religion is a positive unit of society, which is created by the society for its smooth functioning in regards to the legislation and regulation. In Hindu religion, we can see different forms of God and Goddess. ‘Gaṇṣeani or Vināyaki’ is seen as a Hasti-mukh (Elephant headed) Goddess. The name Gaṇṣeani is not found in the list of the śaktis of Gaṇeśa like other similar Goddess (as Brahmani, Indrani and Mahesavari are the sakits of Brahma, Indra and Mahesvara). Vināyaki’s worship was not much popular in Ancient India. Vināyaki is seen in the list of the Yoginis and other Goddesses. We can see Vināyaki’s images along with other Yoginis in some of the famous Chaunsatha-Yoginis temples. Vināyaki is seen in Hindu as well as in Jain and Buddhist religion.

Key-Words: Vināyaki, Yogini, Matrakās, Gaṇapatya cult, Tāntricism, Gaṇapatihridaya.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is a positive unit of society, which is created by the society for its smooth functioning in regards to the legislation and regulation. Any deity is a cumulative creation of the society’s ideals, aspirations and necessary value system. Religion and Society cannot be seen in isolation. Present paper describes with one of such deity, ‘Gaṇṣeani, Vināyaki’, which demonstrates the inter-connection of society and religion. The name Gaṇṣeani is not found in the list of the śaktis of Gaṇeśa like other similar Goddess (as Brahmani, Indrani and Mahesavari are the sakits of Brahma, Indra and Mahesvara). Vināyaki’s worship was not much popular in Ancient India. Vināyaki is seen in the list of the Yoginis and other Goddesses. We can see Vināyaki’s images along with other Yoginis in some of the famous Chaunsatha-Yoginis temples (Rakhian, Bheraghat, Hanipur, Ranipur-Jhariyal, etc.).

Vināyaki is not very famous in Indian Goddess. It’s iconography evidence is also very less in Indian art. But it seems that it is due to the rise of the Gaṇapatya cult. Yogini worship and Tāntricism that Vināyaki also came to be regarded as an important female deity during the early mediaeval period.¹ H.D. Bhattachary also feels that ‘even a śaktis of Gaṇeśa (Gaṇṣeani) was subsequently conceived when Gaṇeśa became a major deity.’² We can see its presence in Jaina and Buddhist literary work. The elephant-headed Goddess is referred to as Gajānana, occupies the first place in the list given in the 45th chapter of Kāśi-khaṇḍa of the Skanda Puraṇa, wherein reply to a question by Vyāsa, Skanda gives him the names of the Chaunsatha-Yoginis.³ Skanda Puraṇa describes that Laksmi got an elephant head when she was cursed by a Brahmana. An elephant faced god mother goddess is mentioned in the Skanda Puraṇa. The Visnudharmottara Puraṇa speaks about a goddess Vināyaki who was created by Siva to lick the blood of demon Andhaka.⁴ The Matsya Purana also is given the name of Vināyakis with the other two hundred goddesses.⁵ All these Vināyakis are ascribed a work similar to Gaṇeśa that is to put impediments and also to remove them. It is the interesting fact that Gaṇṣeani or Vināyaki is different from the composite image of Gaṇeśa and his śaktis.

The Jains also worshipped Vināyaki as one of the Yoginis. It is proved by a Jaina manuscript n.396, preserved in the Hamsa Vijay collection, Jaina Mandir, Baroda.⁶

In Buddhism, the elephant-headed goddess has been described as Gaṇapatihridaya. Gaṇapatihridaya is one faced, two armed, exhibits in her two hands the varada (gift bestowing) and abhaya (fear not) poses, and shows the dancing attitude.⁷

An image which is thought to be the earliest elephant headed female divinity can be seen, which was discovered during the excavations at Rairh in the former state of Jaipur in Rajasthan. It is circa 1st century B.C. to 1st A. D. ⁸

One also important Vināyaki can be seen in the early Gupta period. This is a standing image. It is preserved in Government Museum, Mathura (N. 509). This image shows her two-armed, potbellied and elephant faced. She has worn a tiger skin and holds a lotus in her left hand. ⁹

A fragmentary relief from Mathura, preserved in the Mathura Museum.¹⁰ depicts the Sapta-matrkas. The figure on the extreme right in this panel is elephant-faced with her trunk turned towards right which is curled near her ear. This image can be assigned to the Kushana period.

K. D. Bajpai has discovered group of eighteen Yogini sculptures at Lohri in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh. She has two arms, the tiara and the plain stele indicate the continuance of early art traditions and suggests the date of the sculptural to 9th century.¹¹

Vināyaki depicted with matrakās at Garhwa,(Fig.1) district Allahabad. The slab depicts the elephant-faced matrakās with Narasimhi and Vārāhi. The four armed, elephant-faced goddess is depicted seated in lalit-asana. She has worn a girdle. Her hand, wrists and neck are adorned with beaded ornaments. She is uni-tusked and of stout built. The mount rat is carved beneath her seat. This image can be assigned to circa tenth century A. D.¹²



Fig.1 : Vināyaki with matrakās at Garhwa, Allahabad

Harshanath near Sikar in Rajasthan is famous for the Purānā Mahādeva temple. Some other sculptures of various Hindu divinities are near the temple. Vināyaki embedded in one of the walls and worshipped by coatings of vermilion on her face and other parts of the body. She wears a Karanda-makuta. Her trunk shown between the prominent tusks is curved to the left.¹³

A charming image found at Tikamgarh (Madhya Pradesh) is an excellent example of Chandella workmanship, 10th century A.D. Vināyaki shows her dancing pose. The four armed goddess wears a tiara, usual ornament and Sāri. She holds a battle-axe (Paraśu) and a bowl of sweet balls (modakas) in her upper hands, the lower left hand carries her damaged tooth, while lower right hand is held in dancing gesture. As also shown in several images of Nritya-Gaṇeśa from the Khajuraho region.¹⁴

A carved sculpture of Vināyaki found from Hinglajgarh,, (Fig.2) district Mandsore. It is now preserved in the Bir Museum, Bhopal. She has four-armed, seated in abhaya-mudrā. She has worn a Kanda-mukuta, the jewelled ornaments and a long garland. All the hands and trunk are broken. She is seated in the lower seat and a rat is carved under her seat. The image may belong to circa early 10th century A.D.



Fig.2 : Vināyaki Hinglajgarh, Mandsore, 10th century A.D.

An elephant-faced goddess is found in the Chaunsatha-Yogini temple at Bheraghat, district Jabalpur. The name of the goddess Śri-Aingini is inscribed on the pedestal, probably it was her local name, as one of the Yoginis in that area. The special features are thin waist and a two-armed, elephant-faced figure carved beneath her seat. All her four hands and the trunk are broken. But her Karanda-mukuta, necklace, armlets and anklets can be noticed. She has worn sari which is tightened at the waist with a girdle from which festoons are hanging on her thighs. She also wears a long garland. This image can be assigned to circa 10th century A.D.

The image of Vināyaki, numbered as 38 in the serial order in the Chaunsatha-Yogini temple at Hirapur in Orissa. Its hair is arranged in jata-mukuta. She wears a beautiful necklace. This image can be assigned to tenth century A.D.

The Chaunsatha-Yogini temple at Ranipur-Jhariyal also in Orissa, has an image of Vināyaki. She wears a beautiful jata-makuta, usual ornaments and sari.¹⁵

An image of Vināyaki from Giriye, district Patna, Bihar is preserved in Indian museum, Calcutta. Goddess is seated in padmasana on a lotus seat. Her hairs are arranged in Jata-Mukuta. Her trunk first hangs straight and then is curled towards left. This image belongs to Pāla period and can be assigned to circa eleventh century A.D.¹⁶

The famous temple of Sri Natarāja at Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu, has a unique image of Vināyaki. It is very interesting from the iconographic point of view. The upper part of her body is quite similar to the elephant-headed Vināyaki figures, but strangely enough her lower part is that of a Vyāla having powerful claws. She holds a flower in her right hand and sweet balls (modakas) in her proboscis and also the extended left hand. It has been dated to the Vijayanagara period, 16th century A.D., is still worshipped by the local people of the area.¹⁷

A beautiful bronze image of Vināyaki found in Karnataka and presently preserved in the Chitrapur Math Museum, Shirali, north Kanara. The four armed goddess holds axe and noose in upper hands and her lower hands, are held in abhaya and varada poses. It has been dated to the Vijayanagara period, 16th century A.D.

A very good bronze Vināyaki image is also found from Kerala. It is preserved in the Staatl museum Furvolkerkunde, Munchen. Goddess is seated here as cross-legged on a lotus mounted on a block pedestal. It is much similar like other bronze icons. The date of the image has been the late Chera period, circa 17th century A.D..

Conclusion :

We have seen Vināyaki in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religions. In Hindu and Jain, she had been included in the list of the sixty four Yoginis. The Buddhists adored her under the name of Ganapatihridaya. Temples dedicated to sixty four Yoginis have been found at Khajuraho, Bheraghat, Ranipur-Jhariyal, etc. It can be said that Vināyaki was worshipped both as one of the sixty four Yoginis and also as an independent goddess. In beginning, Vināyaki was not very important in female deity, but popularity of the goddess Vināyaki seems to have increased in the early mediaeval period and she was invariably given an important place in the temples of Chaunsatha-Yoginis. At the same time, the multiplicity in forms and attributes can also be noted with interest which must have been introduced with the rising popularity of Tantric rituals and practices.

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