

The Two Rare Icons of Parshva Yaksha

—Dr. Balaji Ganorkar*

Two images of elephant faced Gods are found in the niches of Shakti Kunda at Akhaji village located at 15 km south-east to Mahesana district headquarter and 4 km north-east to Ambalisan Railway station on meter gauge line of Western Railway running from Ahmedabad to Delhi.

The first image is studded in a niche located at first landing in south direction of the said Kunda¹. Here the four armed elephant faced deity is standing in *tribhanga* posture. The trunk of this deity is leftwards and in a situation indicating that he is drinking some liquid, which is carried by his front hand in a beautiful *bhrungaraka* (i.e. vessel). The right front hand is mutilated from the elbow, while the back right hand holds a three hooded *sarpa* (i.e. cobra) and the left hand carries an *ankusa* (i.e. goad). The deity is canopied by five hooded cobra. He bears cap type metallic head dress and other usual ornaments. It is noteworthy that both teeth are present here and body is simple and slim. A snake is seated beside the left of the deity.

The same type of image with some variations is found studded in a niche located on the first landing in northern direction². It is also elephant faced and four armed. The canopy of five hooded cobra and a snake beside the left leg as well as the ornaments are common. Standing posture is *dvibhanga* and the trunk of this deity is making coil on the right side. The back right hand holds three hooded cobra and the left holds a scripture, while the front right and left hands are bearing an *ankusha* (goad) and a small *bhrungaraka* (ves-

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sel) respectively. The body is also slim and normal.

These two images are identified as Ganesha by Dr. P. C. Parikh but the absence of *mushak* (rat), *Bhagnadanta* (broken tooth), *modakpatra* (bowl of sweet balls) and *lambodara* (pot bellied stomach) etc. the peculiar characteristics of the deity are lacking. These features are necessary in the icons of Ganesha.

In Jain traditions, there is a Yaksha, named as Parshva Yaksha. According to *Shilpa Ratnakar*³ and *Trishashti Shalakupurusha Charitra*⁴, he is canopied by cobra-hoods. He is also described as elephant-faced and his attributes are *bijapuraka* (citrus), *Sarpa* (snake) and *varadamudra* etc. His mount is tortoise. This Yaksha is associated with Parshvanath, the 23rd Teerthankara of Jain religion. Here the symbol of tortoise and cobra beside the left leg is visible. The cobra-hoods over the head and snake in one of his hands suggest that these images may be considered as Parshva Yaksha of Jain tradition. Perhaps, these icons were brought here in this holy Kunda from some nearby Jain temple and due to elephant face, they are commonly accepted as Ganesha, the most popular Hindu deity.

Unfortunately, only one image of Parshva Yaksha, preserved in the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Mumbai, was noted by Late K. V. Dave⁴. It is interesting to note that Parshva Yaksha disappeared and intermixed with the images of Ganesha and Vinayaka, who are also elephant faced Gods. Even we may see that iconography of Vinayaka and his images are also rarely known in all over India at present. Only one such ancient image is being worshipped in Siddhi Vinayaka's famous temple at Kashi Vishwanath lane in Varanasi.

Foot Notes

1. Parikh Pravin C., Shakti Kunda at Akhaj, fig. no.6, Ahmedabad, 1989.
2. Ibid. fig no.17.
3. Shilparatnakara, 12/78, Dhrangdhra, 1939.
4. Dave K. V., Gujaratnu Murti Vidhan, p. 494-495
5. Ibid.