

Women in Gurjara-Pratihara's art: A study

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Abstract

The Gurjara-Pratihara's of Kanyakubja (Kanauj) were one of the prominent and earliest Rajputa rulers of north India who succeeded in yielding supremacy over north in circa 8th century A.D. The period between circa 7th to 12th century A.D. in north India has its own importance for its political and socio-economic development, which was marked by feudal tendencies. After the fall of the Gupta empire political unity was shattered which resulted in the emergence of new royal dynasties, and a conscious regional outlook throughout India. The political struggle for supremacy resulted into political fragmentation which vastly affected the socio-economic life of north India. The material milieu of the period had a comprehensive effect on its social structure. In the category of secular images we find maidens, Mithuna figures, Surasundri's Musicians, dancers and other female depictions in the scenes of daily life. The female figures are found in standing, sitting and as well as reclining postures. They are depicted alone or with their male counter-parts. The standing figures are in sambhanga, dvibhanga or tribhanga poses. However, we do not find secular female figures in a sambhanga pose. It was popular in the case of devine females. Probably this posture was utilized to represent the unshakable calmness and firm immutability of the deity.

Keywords: Parvati, Durga, Mahisasuramardini, Lakshmi, Padma, Sarasvati, Ganga and Yamuna, Saptamatrika's

Introduction

Parvati

Parvati is supposed to be one of the aspects of devi. The markandeya purana gives the detail about her origin. She has been called Uma and Gauri respectively in the Vishnu-dharmottara purana and Kumarasambhava. In the canons of art, however, we found the minute differences regarding the rules for the iconography of Uma and Parvati. Though both have been mentioned as chaturhastha and hold the objects like aksha-mala, kamala and kamandalu in three of their hands but it differs for Uma who should carry a darpana with her fourth hand and Gauri should be shown with one hand in abhaya-mudra^[1]. The sculpture of Parvati, installed in the Gandarmal temple at Badoh-Pathari, deserve mention. Here Parvati is shown in samabhanga-sthanaka posture. She is four armed and embellished with the Laltika, Jatajuta, Kundala, hara, yajnopavita and adhostra. Behind her hands the agniputra's are shown from which the flames are rising. She holds an akshamala, Kamandalu, Sruva and one of her hands is in the varadamudra. Artistically, the sculpture may, however, be assigned to circa 9th century A.D. An image of Parvati seated in svastikasana on a lotus is found from Mutadevi temple (Kanpur). It shows the two armed goddess carrying aksamala and Kamandalu and a yogpatta also goes around her crossed legs. She is adorned with her usual ornaments. Elongated ears and half closed eyes show her state of meditation (8th cent. A.D.) Parvati is frequently represented on one of the bhadr niches of the temples of Gopadri (Gwalior). She is shown engaged in Panchayagnitapa. The images are generally in standing posture with a few exceptions of seated deities. In the image from a small temple of Bhutesvara group of temples, Batesara, the goddess is seated in Utkutukasana. In the plain

pilastered niche, the goddess is seated on a round pedestal placed on foliage. She is four handed shown with varadamudra, aksamala, sruva and kamandalu. On the right side, a face of lion is shown below her knee. Another image of seated Parvati at Bhutesvara temple, (Batesara), shows her in lalitasana. In the lower position, in addition to lion, a deer is also shown on the left of the deity. The image is carved in accordance to the description of the Kumarasambhava." A similar image of seated Parvati is also portrayed in the northern bhadr niche of temple no. 22 at Naresar (8th cent A.D.). Parvati, standing on lotus pedestal in sambhanga pose and performing Panchagnitapa's. is sculptured in a niche of a temple at Naresar. The goddess, is four armed with varadamudra, rosary, sruva and kamandaht^[2]. Prominent Jata-juta elongated ear-lobes, ekavali and vogapatla adorn the goddess. On her right and left are depicted a lion and a deer gazing at her. Of the four, three pots containing the flames are clearly visible. The body of Parvati is beautifully carved as the illustration of Kalidasa's description. Similar images of Parvati in standing posture are also carved with minor variations on the other temples at Naresar, Amrol, Terahi and Mahua. An image of Parvati is shown standing on a godha in Samabhanga pose is known to us from Jogeshwar. An another colossal image found from Baijnath. (Almora) (9th-I Othcent. A.D.)^[3] she is shown accompanied by several deities such as lakshmi, Brahma, Agni, Siva, Ganesha and Ganga, etc. in an artistic manner. Some images of goddess Parvati have also been reported from the region of Haryana, the western point of Gurjara-- Pratihara's region. An image of brown sandstone is found studded in a niche from Bhima devi temple, Pinjore. In this niche, four armed goddess Parvati has been shown in the Sambhanga Pose (c. 811-9th Cent. A.D.). Another image of

this deity was reported from sundrapura (Panchkula). The four armed deity is shown standing in Sambhanga pose along with two attendants. The right front hand of the image is broken (c. 8th-9th cent. A.D.). A well preserved architectural piece representing the. *ṣukanitsa*, contains a charming head of Uma was reported from pinjore (c. cent.A.D.). Now it is displayed in Kurukshetra University museum. A broken piece of sculpture, preserving only the head of Parvati deserves attention because of its artistic value. It was discovered from *agroha* and housed in Chandigarh museum. A beautiful crest, studded with pearls and gems shown on the head, suggests the importance of the image. A bust of Parvati is collected from. Find by the Haryana state museum. The face of the bust is mutilated and right front head is broken. While in the rest three hands, she carries a trident and a *itlatulunga* fruit. The goddess is decked with *jatamukuta*, beaded necklace, *hara*, ear-rings and beaded bracelets. A lotus shaped halo is shown around the head of the goddess (10th 11-1 116 cent. A.D.)

Durga

A lot of references regarding goddess Durga are mentioned in the ancient Indian literature. First reference of Durga as a synonym of Ambika and the consort of Rudra is mentioned in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* [4]. The images of Durga of the period under review are represented with two, four, eight or ten arms. We have found the images of Durga from Terahi (Distt. Shivpuri), Kanauj, Mathura, Gopeshwar, Gadarmal temple Badoh (Vidisha) and Jogeshwar. In the image of Terahi, Durga is shown with two arms. The image is now displayed in Gwalior museum. In this image Goddess is seated in *lalitasana* on her *Vahan* lion and she probably carries a lotus bud in her left hand. The right arm of the image is mutilated. The hair is combed in *idhammilat* style and the eyes are shown on the forehead. Below on both sides of Goddess a pair of attendants is shown. (816 cent A.D.) Another icon of Durga in the Durga mandir, Saraimira (Kanauj), shows the seated goddess on a lotus *pitha* in *lalitasana* [5]. She carries in her hands a *aksamedha*, lotus, book and *kamandalu*. A lion is seated below while flying *vidhyddhara*'s are shown above the image. The image is still worshipped. An image of Durga with four hands is preserved in the Mathura museum and represents the goddess seated on two lions placed back to back and accompanied by two attendants [3] (8th cent. A.D.). The image from Gopeshwar shows the goddess in standing posture and carries in her hands a rosary, bow and *Kamandalu*, while the front right hand is in *Varadamudra* (10th 1 Cent. A.D.) The image of Gadarmal temple, Badoh (Vidisha) shows the goddess resting her folded left leg on the back of the seated lion and the right leg in stretched position is. Placed on the floor. The goddess is tying the *mtpura* with two of her hands. Two female attendants flank the image. On the left of goddess another attendant is carrying *sringara petika*. In the ten-armed image from Jogeshwar, the goddess is shown seated in *lalisana* on her *Vahana*. On her right, Ganesha is seated with folded hands, while on her left, a female attendant is depicted" (801 cent A.D.). Some image of Durga with eight and ten hands is also reported from Haryana. An image of Durgii is presently worshipped in a temple in village Chhota-mandhana, Kafka, Distt. Panchkula. In this image the goddess is depicted in *lalitasana* on a lion [32] (9th 10-11 cent A.D.). Another image

of this type is noticed from village Murad Jayantipur (Distt. Ambala) and now housed in Haryana state museum. The goddess is shown with ten hands and seated in *lalitasana* on lotus pedestal resting on the lying human figure and a lion. A badly mutilated upper part of Durga was also reported from pinjore and now displayed in Kurukshetra university museum (c. 9th-10th cent. A.D.)

Mahisasuramardini

The story of Goddess Mahisasuramardini is recorded in the *Vamanapurana* and the *Matsyapurana*. Numerous mythical stories related to the form of Goddess Mahisasuramardini are preserved in the *purana*'s. Sculptural representation of this theme appears to be quite popular in the Gurjara-Pratihara period. The goddess in these images is shown with four to twelve hands. The images of goddess are housed in Gaurishankar temple, Kanauj, Allahabad museum, Durga mandir Saraimira (Kanauj), Lucknow museum, Gujjar-Kheri, (Sonapat), Sirsa (Haryana), Temple of Chandimandir Cantt, (Panchkula), Village Mandhana, (Kalka) Morni-Ka-Tal, Panchkula (Haryana), Besnagar (Vidisha), Hinglajgarh and Kherat (Bhind). One of the earliest icons of goddess is noticed from Besnagar (Vidisha). In this piece of art the artist has achieved perfection in depicting the natural expression. At Ramgarh (Badoh-Pathari) the display of Mahisamardini, in one of the caves is noteworthy. Here she has been shown with four hands and she wears usual ornaments having nicely combed hair. She is squaring the neck of the demon with one of her left hands and with right hand she is pressing the hack of demon Mahisa to trample it, with remaining two hands she holds a shield and trident respectively. It is interesting to mention that the goddess has been usually shown in actions of piercing the trident in the neck of demon. While she is shown here without trident in the neck of demon (8th cent A.D.). Similar and contemporary to it another sculpture of the deity has been noticed from Hinglajgarh, where the goddess has four arms and depicted in *Pratyalidha* posture in full action of killing the demon Mahisaxa. The demon appears to be struggling to raise its body and Devi has pierced the trident in the neck, here the goddess has four arms and depicted in *Pratyalidha* posture in full action of killing the demon Mahisa. The demon appears to be hack of demon firmly. She holds a *Khadga*, *ghanta* and pulling up the hair of demon with her hands. Devi's hair is arranged in *dhammila* fashion besides her nice ornamentation. A four armed image of Mahisasuramardini T, datable to the eighth century A.D., is found in Gauri Shankar temple, Kanauj [6]. The goddess is killing the demon Mahisa by a trident which she is holding in one of her right hands. In the other right hand she carries a sword and in her left hand she holds a shield and the tail of the demon! Another four handed image of the goddess is carved on a pillar lying in a garden in Kanauj. The goddess presses the Mahisa's head downwards. But instead of catching it by the tail she grasps one of its legs. Devi carries in her left hands a trident and sword. While in the upper right hand she may hold a small bell (c. 9th cent A.D.). An image of the same period is also housed in the Allahabad museum, in which her *Vahan* lion is also shown attacking the buffalo demon. An image of this deity of C. 10th cent. A.D. was noticed from Kherat (Bhind). It is one of the most advanced displays of

Mahisasuramardini. In this image deity is shown with twenty arms. But her head is lost. She wears the graiveyaka, hara, Vanama. Valaya and Padakataka. In remaining five of her right hands, she holds the chakra, jankha, khetaka, khadga and gada and six left hands had a chakra, clamant, Kapala, trisarla, Sakti and pulling up the hair of demon with one hand, but the remaining hands are damaged. In the Durga mandir, Saraimira (Kanauj). There is an eight handed Mahisasuramardini which depicts the theme with forceful Expression. Here the demon Mahisa is shown in human form with a sword in his hand coming out of the severed head of the buffalo. A grey sandstone image of the goddess is placed in a temple for worship at Chandimandir cantt (Panchkula, Haryana). In this image the deity holds in her right hand clock-wise javelin or Lance, arrow, scull cup. Sword. Trident, shield, bow and the hair of inahisa (c. 9th-10th cent. A.D.). Another ten armed image of the deity was found from a temple at village Chotta-mandhana, Kalka (9th 11-10111 cent A.D.). Third image of this type was recovered from Morni-Ka-Tal (Panchkula), now exhibited in the Chandigarh Museum. (10th cent A.D.). This image is highly damaged.

Lakshmi

In the Gurjara-pratihara art the sculpture of Lakshmi are found comparatively lesser than those of Parvati and Saraswati. The image of Lakshmi displayed on the lintel of temple no. 12 at Devagarh is noteworthy. The image is four armed and decked with various ornaments. The upper right hands of devi holds a lotus stalk and the lower right hand is shown in the Varadamudra. Her upper left hand is broken. But in lower left hand she holds a lotus. In this image the artist has successfully exposing the deity in the saumya posture. The icon of Lakshmi is also depicted in the Gadarmal temple. In this image the goddess is seated on a lotus pitha in laliteisana, carrying a lotus in her left hand, while the right hand is in Varadamudra. The two female attendants are also shown flanking the goddess. The goddess lakshmi is also shown with two elephants performing abhiseka of the goddess. Sometimes she is carved with Ganesha and Kubera simultaneously or with Kubera alone. These deities are associated with wealth. The Mathura museum preserves both types of Gajalakshmi images." A rare type icon of Lakshmi seated on Garuda is seen from Jogeshwar. In this image she is four handed and carries, ankhas gado and.

Padma (C. 10th cent. A.D.).

An Architectural member probably a door lintel of Asana Lakshmi is also recovered from Agroha mound, Hisar, (Haryana) and now exhibited in the Haryana state museum. On this slab, the goddess Lakshmi is carved in the central niche seated in the Padmosana on a Lotus pedestal. The four handed goddess keeps her front two hands in yogic posture, while the right upper hand is holding a lotus stalk and the left is broken. The deity is decked with her usual ornaments and drapery. Horizontally to the right side in the corner, the image of seated GaneAa is worked out in a niche with her usual attributes, whereas on the left corner of the slab, the figure of seated Kubera is chiselled in a similar type of niche. On the adjoining left and right side of the goddess Lakshmi, two flying Vidhyudhara's are shown comparatively bigger in size.

A flying female couple carrying a crown followed by two Vidyddharas, one on each side, is executed on the extreme below the image of Lakshmi (c. 9th -10th cent. A.D.). A four handed pratihara image of Gaja-lakshmi enshrined in a small lane at Kapalamochan (Haryana) and painted by the priest to make it more attractive and still under worship shows the goddess seated in Sukhosana on a fully blossomed double-petalled lotus seat with proper right hand in the gesture of reassurance and the principal left holding a conch (?), with additional hands supporting the lotuses from which the elephants pour water on her. A fly whisker stands on either side and interestingly there are two lions on the sides of the pedestal which emphasize her Kshamankari aspect. The goddess wears usual ornaments details of which have been concealed by the paint. But the dhannilla coiffure, thin waist and expression of beatitude on her face are very clear.

Sarasvati

Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and fine arts is also accepted in the Buddhist and Jaina pantheons. In the Hindu mythology she is described as the daughter and also the consort of Brahma and the Sakti of Visnu. A sculpture of the deity carved on the entrance of shrine room in temple No. 12 at Devagarh is noteworthy in the Pratihara art. She is four armed and wears the lalchitika, Kundala, Kanthsri. dvilvalthara, Keyfira, valaya, Katimekhala, Plidakataka and sari. She holds a vinci and pustaka with her left lower hand while the left upper hand is supporting the Vina as per musical rules. I-ler Flair is dressed in dhammila fashion which enhances the artistic merit of deity. Similar sculpture of the deity has been noticed in a devakulikei of Jaraimata temple at Barua-Sagar (Jhansi) ^[7]. A simple image of Saraswati with only two hands is carved in a niche of the eastern face of Jagati of Gadarmal temple, Badoh. She is seated on a lotus pithy in lalitelisana and plays a Mil. The image is datable to the ninth century A.D. Another image of the four armed goddess Saraswati now in the Lucknow museum, depicts in ardhaparyanka Osana. In this image she carries a Vinci in the front right hand, the back right hand is broken and she holds a pustaka and a musical rod in her left hands. I-ler mount swan is also visible below. Two couple with folded hands are also visible there." An interesting figure of Sarasvati is housed in the Sarnath museum. It represents the goddess playing on a Vina. Above her head is the foliage of a tree and to her right is shown a jar standing upside down The image of the goddess Saraswati was taken in charge by the Haryana state museum From a village Durjanpur, Distt. Jind (Haryana). The icon is broken below the portion of thighs and looks to be standing in dvibhanga pose. The two armed goddess is shown holding a bloomed lotus in her raised right hand and a Vind in the left hand. She is adorned with a Kaabandha in Jatii-Ata fashion, Sarpakundala in her left ear and the right one is elongated necklace, ekavali, bracelets, girdle, scarf crossing both the hands, and sari. A mutilated lotus shaped halo is carved out around her head. Though the face of the goddess is mutilated, yet the other limbs such as. prominent breasts, deep navel, attenuated waist and proportionate chiseling etc. show that the artist was not lacking aesthetic sense (c. 911'-- 10th Cent. A. D.).

Ganga and Yamuna

The image of the river goddesses Gang' and Yamuna were invariably sculptured on the lower parts of the door-jambs in the Gurjara-Pratihara period. A beautiful specimen from etch, now preserved in the Bharat Kara Bhavan, Varanasi, shows the goddess Gang standing in tribhanga posture. She carries a ghata in her left hand and in right she holds the end of her Uttariya. A female attendant is standing with a chhatra. Some image of goddess Gang is also recovered from the Haryana region. The sculpture of Ganga from Kapalamochan, Distt. Yamunanagar is acquired by Haryana state museum. In this image the goddess is shown standing in sambhanga pose on her mount makara. In her two hands, she carries a water pot in the right raised hand and left one is resting on the hip. The water pot and the crocodile are shown in the incised lines, where as the deity is depicted in the high relief. The goddess is decked with ear-rings, torque and bangles (c. 8th-9th cent. A.D.). Another image of Ganga is collected from Prachi Siva Temple. Pehowa. by the state museum Haryana. In this image the deity standing in devibhanga pose with two hands. She carries a pot in her left raised hand and holding the end of drapery with her right hand. The goddess wears a ear-ring, necklace. ckuvali. armllets. bracelets. Girdle and anklets. She wears a beautiful J iid a with a big knot at the back. The developed bosom, attenuated waist and heavy hips enrich the feminine beautyn (c. 8th- 9th cent. A.D.) Another pilaster made of greenish sandstone also shows the goddess Gana. This image shows the same features as mentioned above (c. 9th-10th cent. A.D.). The image of Yamuna is worked out on a door-jamb and installed in Prachi-iy a Temple. Pehowa (Kurukshetra). In this image the goddess Yamunii is shown standing in dvibhanga pose on a pedestal placed on a tortoise. Her mount, to the Extreme right of the slab. She holds the garments with her left hand, while the right one is broken. The goddess is adorned Karndansukuiia, Sarpa-kundala beaded-necklace. elaiwali armllets. anklets, bracelets, girdle, sari and scarf. On the left side of the goddess, a female is shown standing in fribhanga pose, with her right leg bent and she wears the same ornaments and drapery and holds a flower stalk in her right hand (9th- 10th cent. A.D.)^[8].

Saptamatrika's

The worship of Mother Goddess is the earliest link of Indian thesim^[9]. This tradition got popularity during the period of the Kushana's, Sunga's, Gupta's and the Pratihara's etc. In the Pratihara art. The depiction of saptamatrika's was noticed in the Sirapatti of the temple situated in the western group of Batesar temples which is ascribed to c. 8" cent. A.D. Here the figures of Saptamatrika's with their mounts are shown in the sequence from left to right i.e. Brahmani, Maheivari, Kumari, Vaisnavi, Varahi, Indrani Chamundii and the figures of Ganaa and Virabhadra standing on either sides on their respective mounts. A number of panels of the period under review. Representing Saptamatrika's in standing, dancing or in seated positions are recovered from various places. Some Matrika's icons have been noticed from Sita-ram ki Lawan (Bhind) where a panel of dancing matrika's is depicted on the sirapatti of a vaishnava temple^[10]. They are well ornamented with the usual ornaments. However. Kumari is carrying a baby in her lap; Varahi and Krsodari-Chmunda arc dancing while the

figures of dancing Ganda and virabhadra arc also shown on the top behind the goddess.

A finely carved Panel from Kanauj shows the deities standing in tribhanga mudra. The Panel is however mutilated and only the representations of Vaisnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Chamunda, who are standing on a pedestal carved with circular lotus petals are still preserved. All the deities are four handed with their respective attributes." Similarly another panel depicting the five mother goddess is preserved in Kanauj museum. Here the entire panel shows the figures of only five matrika's who are well ornamented, and hold the usual objects, but Kaumari is shown with a baby in her lap. All these deities have a ornamented halo duly surmounted by the maladharas. Another mutilated panel of the Saptamatrika's is placed in the archaeological museum. Kanauj. It depicts the deities in dancing posture. The mutilated piece has Brahmani, Mahesvari. Kaumtiri, Vaisnavi and huirani. The faces of the deities have been chopped off. Behind their heads imposing halos have been carved, while above them flying Vidhyadhara's are shown. Another dancing pose of Saptamatrika's depicts on a panel discovered from Terahi, now housed in the Gwalior museum. This tenth century mutilated specimen now has only Varahi with a fish in one of her hands, Indrcini with vajra and child and Chamunda with a Khalvanga^[11]. A complete panel of the seated Matrika's in ardhaparyanka mudra on their respective vehicles is displayed in the Lucknow museum. which were discovered from Varanasi. All the deities are two handed, excepting Vaisnavi, who is depicted four handed. Another panel from Terahi (Distt. 4hivapuri) is now in the Gwalior museum which shows the two handed goddess seated in the Ionic-now. Each with a child in her lap. Virabhadra with a Vines is shown in the beginning, while Gamin with mndaka and parasu is depicted at the end of the stele^[12]. The same tradition of depicting mother goddesses on the girpatti of temples has been followed by the artists at Jaraimath (Baruasagar), Mankhera, Umari (Tikamgarh), Gadarmal temple (Badoh-Pathari), Chauramukha temple at Nachana (Panna) and Maladevi temple at Gyaraspur (Vidisha). In sun temples at Umari and Mankhera, these Saptamatrika's are shown to the left of Lakitabimba holding usual objects in their hands. It is interesting that at these places Brahamani has been depicted with four laces and Matrika's are invariably guarded by GaneAa and Virabhadra. Some images of matrika's have also been reported from the region of Haryana. The icon of Matrika was found at Bhima Devi temple pinjore and now exhibited in the state museum Haryana. The two armed goddess has been shown seated in lathasana on a round shaped pedestal. The deity is holding her left breast with right hand to feed the child seated on her left lap. A flying Vidhyadhara is shown on the right side (9th - 10th cent. A.D.)." Another sandstone image of matrika was reported from pinjore and now displayed in Kurukshetra university museum. The image is badly defaced. The two armed deity Saivi, the consort of lord Siva seated in Lalitasana pose lip, on a raised pedestal and holding a child. (10th—11th Cent. A.D.)

As in the case of Indian art of all time, the female figures in thee plastic art of Gurjara-Pratihara's period too, are evidently of both the categories viz. religious as well as secular. In religious figure's women are worshipped as devi like Paravati,

Durga, Mahisaruramardini, Saptmatrika's viz., Brahmani, Indrani Varahi Vaisnvi, Mahesvari and Chamunda. In the Gujara-Pratihara art the sculpture of Lakshmi are found comparatively lesser than those of Yamuna were invariably sculptured on the lower parts of the door-jambs in Pratihara's times. The temple No. 12 at Deogarh and Maladevi temple at Gyaraspur are important monuments of Gurjara-Pratihara period which possess a series of Yaksini's. The expressive execution of an image of a Jain tutelary couple, found from Lachchhagir (Distt. Allahabad) is worth mentioning. In this icon the female holds a child in her lap, behind whom is an attendant figure. During Pratihara's period Buddhist art has yielded important Buddhist images of this period. Tara the famous Buddhist goddess, the icon of in her simplest form, recovered from Sarnath. Apart from the religious icons the sculptural art of the Gurjara-Pratihara's period also contains the secular images viz. Surasundri's Mithuna, erotic scene, young maiden playing with ball, Salabhanjika's, female dancer's, Kumarika's and wringing hair scenes of women's.

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