

Rigvedic Reference to Gajalakshmi: Her Representation in Temples and Stupas

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Abstract

Gajalakshmi is one of the eight manifestations of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, associated with wealth and prosperity. This form of the goddess is more popular than other manifestations, is often depicted in art, and is particularly popular in panels. The earliest literary source of Lakshmi's role as the goddess of wealth can be traced from Sri Sukta, an ancient Vedic hymn found in the Rig Veda, an appended part of Rigveda Khila Sukta. The Gajalakshmi form is represented in art as Lakshmi seated or standing on a lotus, flanked by elephants who pour abhisheka, or sacred water, on her with a pot. This depiction can be found in the early architecture of Stupas dating back to the second century BCE and suggests that the glory of Gajalakshmi was manifested in art before this time. While depicting Lakshmi on a lotus with elephants is common in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples, the variations in the lotuses and stone slabs are interesting. An insightful study of the Gajalakshmi medallion objectively applies literary history, iconography, and its depictions through the passage of architectural representations, and the interpretation will have a stronger foundation of the Vedic religious values.

Keywords: Rigveda, South Asian studies, Archaeology, Symbolism, Ancient Indian history, Buddhist stupas, Indian archaeology, goddess of wealth.

Introduction

Gajalakshmi is one of the eight manifestations of the goddess Lakshmi. Though we are familiar with the figures depicting the manifestations of Lakshmi, Gajalakshmi panels are more popular than other forms in all three faiths: Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Though the Jain and Buddhist faiths venerated perfect ascetics Tirthankaras and Buddha as ultimate models to follow and did not believe in the creator god-like in Hinduism, Gajalakshmi was equally venerated in all three faiths. The literary source tracing the emergence of Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth is in an appended part of Rig Veda Khila Sukta, which is documented as Sri Sukta 2.6.1-16 (Kashyap 856).

The figures of Gajalakshmi are carved even in the early architecture of the second Century BCE in stupas and coins of the Gandhara period of 1st Century BCE. This suggests that the literary description of the glory of Gajalakshmi was found in the art form and was in vogue before 200-100 BCE. Though Lakshmi, sitting on a lotus flanked by elephants, was a common depiction in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples, some mysterious variations, like the elephants standing on bloom lotus with a long slender stalk or on stone slabs and pouring abhisheka on Lakshmi with a pot, and her standing posture, are intriguing. The emergence of Lakshmi and her manifestations in eightfold forms, referred to as Astalakshmi, needs to be understood before proceeding to the significance of Gajalakshmi.

The Legend about the Emergence of Lakshmi

The Vedic episode of Samudra Manthana is narrated as a story about the spiritual endeavor of self-realization at a human level. Here, only the legend part is considered (Plate.I). This legend connects to the emergence of Lakshmi from the Ksheera Sagara, the ocean of milk when the gods and demons churned it. The associated story is about Indra, the king of devas, who was mounted on Airavata and was once given a garland by sage Durvasa. Indra put it on his Airavata as decoration, but the elephant threw the garland on the bottom. On witnessing this, Sage Durvasa was angered and insulted because the garland was not ordinary, but it was the abode of Sri (fortune and riches). The Sage Durvasa curses Indra to lose all his wealth, resulting in the devas losing all their wealth, strength, and power.

Airavata and the wealth went into the oblivion of the Milky Ocean. The asuras/ demons won over the devas in a battle and took control of the three worlds. On the advice of Vishnu to gain immortality and regain the lost strength and wealth, Amruta, the nectar, had to be consumed, and the milky ocean had to be churned to extract it. Gods invite the demons to pull Amruta by churning the ocean of milk. On the platform

of a tortoise, back (Second avatar of Vishnu), mount Mandara was installed as the churning rod, and Vasuki, the king of the snake, was used as the rope. In the course of churning, lord Shiva consumed poison to stop its flow into the world. Several valuable powers of nature emerged from the ocean bed as part of creation, like the divine cow, white elephant Airavata (which Indra got back), celestial horse, Varuni, Parijat tree, Apsaras, Chandra (the moon), precious gems, Dhanvantari with Amrita ('nectar of immortality') and so on which got owned some by the Devas and some by Demons. The power of wealth, peace, and prosperity emerged as goddess Lakshmi from the seabed seated on a lotus. She was the only one among the many treasures that emerged from the ocean, which brought joy and happiness to the world. The devas promised to honor and worship her, and Lakshmi chose Vishnu as her consort. Indra was happy that the aspect of prosperity was retained among Devas. When Lakshmi emerged, the material and spiritual wealth goddess held lotuses in her hands. Indra offered her a lotus seat, and the Airavata poured Abhisheka on Lakshmi with golden pots.

With prosperity being multi-faceted, Lakshmi manifested herself in eight forms, as Asta Lakshmi presiding over eight sources of wealth. The eight manifestations in personified forms were addressed as Adilakshmi, Dhanalakshmi, Dhanyalakshmi, Gajalakshmi, Santanalakshmi, Dhairyalakshmi, Vijayalakshmi, and Vidyalakshmi. Prosperity was different for the different classes of people. The Kshatriya class worshipped Vijaya Lakshmi, who showed a sword and shield in their hands, and Vaisyas preferred Dhanalakshmi, where money was depicted. Agriculture-based people worshipped Gajalakshmi for rain and Dhanyalakshmi for grain. The seekers of knowledge worshipped Vidyalakshmi. The iconography of each manifestation was depicted in art through the different accessories held in her hands.

Sri Sukta appended to Rig Veda and the eight manifestations of Lakshmi

Sri Sukta is an ancient Vedic hymn that dates to Rig Veda. The lyrics mainly praise the emergence, form and glory, divine attributes, and bestowing nature of Goddess Lakshmi. She is conceived in a personified form as the beautiful mother Goddess of wealth and prosperity. The various facets of prosperity aspired by humans are also compiled in Sri Sukta. Offering prayers to the eight different manifestations of Lakshmi, such as Asta Lakshmi, to fulfill the aspirations are explained in Sri Sukta. What she bestows in response to prayers is visualized and depicted with relevant accessories held by Asta Lakshmi figures. Sri Sukta is referred to in many schools, and the numbering of the stanzas has variations in different schools. In this article, the accent of text is based on the edition of Vaidika Samshodhana Mandala (VSM) by Dr. C. G. Kashikar, Pune, and as found in the Rig Veda Mantra Samhita by R. L.

Kashyap (Sakshi, 2018) is followed. The introductory essays of the VSM edition state that the Khilasuktas belong to four other nearly extinct Rigveda shakhas: Bhashkala, Ashvalayana, Shankhayana, and Mandukayana, which are evidenced in texts like Brahmanas, and Brihaddevata that refers to the mantras of Khilasuktas. Khilasuktas belong to the end of the Rigvedic period and are additional hymns appended to the regular collection as a supplement that was left unfrequented. The accent marks of Khilasukta phrases are slightly different from the Rigveda text. (Kashyap 845)

Sri Sukta commonly chanted about Lakshmi as part of Rig Veda Khila Sukta, part 2.6.2. In a strict sense, though it was part of Rig Veda, it was classified as appended to Rig Veda by the admirers of these hymns. Khila means a supplement in general, an additional hymn appended to the regular collection often used in combination with another Sukta. Some Sri Sukta stanzas define people's wealth concept and have prayers to fulfill their aspirations. The emergence of Lakshmi during Samudra Manthana is described in Sri Sukta as the daughter of the ocean personified as Samudraraja.

*Lakssmim kshira samudra raaja tanayaam shriranga dhaameshvariim |
Daasii bhuuta samasta deva vanitaam lokaika diipamkuraam. 2.6.1, adhika mantra 17,
(Kashyap 858)*

Lakshmi, the daughter of the King of Ocean Ksheera Samudra (literally Milky Ocean), resides in the abode of Sri Vishnu. She is eulogized as the sprout of light and served by the consorts of all Devas. (Sri Suktam Lyrics in English with Meaning and Benefits, Hinduism Outlook Team).

“Taam ma aavaha Jaatavedo lakshmim anapagaamin” (Kashyap 856)

Agni (Jaataveda), the celestial priest, is prayed in Sri Sukta to bring Lakshmi to bestow all wealth and stay forever with the devotees without disappearing. (Sri Suktam Lyrics in English with Meaning and Benefits, Hinduism Outlook Team)

The iconography of her manifestation as Astslakshmi was structured and presented in a personified form of Lakshmi according to the requests of the devotees. The encompassing nature of a protective mother with boundless wealth, bestowing boons of what was aspired by humans, is shown as Lakshmi holding the Abhaya mudra of protection and Varada mudra of granting boons along with different accessories in her hands.

About her iconographic representation, Sri Sukta mentions:

*Varaangkushau paasham-abhiiti-mudraam karair-vahantiim kamala asana sthaam |
Baalaarka kotti pratibhaam tri-netraam bhajeham aadyaam jagad isvariim tvaam
2.6.20 adhika mantra. (Kashyap 859)*

From Your four Hands – first is in Vara Mudra (gesture of giving boon which flows in Vara mudra in the left hand which is pointing downwards giving assurance of help during obstacles), second is Abhiti mudra in the right hand, a gesture of protection in Abhaya mudra and fearlessness, third is holding ankusha (a hook), fourth hand holding a pasha (noose). You are placed on the Lotus as the divine status, and you shine like the Sun. The three-eyed goddess is worshipped as Jagadishvari, the protector of the universe.

Lakshmi was not merely the goddess of wealth but also the mistress of all types of wealth. She is the goddess of all virtues, health, beauty, peace, and multi-faceted prosperity. Lakshmi is prayed with names like Maha Lakshmi, Jaya Lakshmi, Siddha Lakshmi, Vara Lakshmi, Sri Lakshmi, and so on, who gave back the previous splendor to the Devas.

Lakshmi manifested itself in eight forms, such as Asta Lakshmi. Though Asta Lakshmi forms are not explicitly mentioned, the request for boons in different fields like knowledge, bounty in rain and harvest, progeny, money for the transaction, requirements of royal people, and overall prosperity are detailed. The form of the goddess responding to these requests is well expressed in Sri Sukta. Asta Lakshmi's manifestations are depicted in (Plate. 2):

1. Adilakshmi-spiritual wealth
2. Dhanalakshmi-material wealth
3. Dhanyalakshmi-agricultural wealth
4. Gajalakshmi-royalty
5. Santanalakshmi-progeny
6. Dhairyalakshmi-courage
7. Vijayalakshmi-victory
8. Vidyalakshmi-knowledge.

Adilakshmi

The primeval Lakshmi, also known as Mahalakshmi, is described in Sri Sukta with many addresses like -

“Sarasija nilaye, saroja haste, ...Padmaanane, Padmapriye, Padma Dalaayataakshi , Padma maalinye, Vishvapriye” (Kashyap 858)

Adi means from the beginning. She emerged being seated on a lotus, the one who holds the lotus in her hand, whose face is like a lotus, one who loves lotus, who has eyes as beautiful as lotus petals, who wears a garland of lotus, one who is loved by all

from the beginning and so on. The lotus symbolizes purity of spiritual knowledge, and She is the bestower of happiness to all classes of people. She is prayed to grant the boon of never-ending wealth. (Sri Suktam - In Sanskrit, with meaning from Rig Veda appendices)

*Aardraam pushkarineem pushtim pingalaam padma-malineem
Chandraam hiranmayeem Lakshmiim jatavedo ma aavaha. 2.6.13 (Kashyap 857)*

Lakshmi, who arose from the pool of water in a well-nourished, youthful form, had a golden complexion, was adorned with a garland of lotuses, and looked like a beautiful moon. Kardama, meaning mud/slime, and Chiklidam, meaning moisture/freshness, were seen as the progeny of Lakshmi, who was asked to make a garland of lotuses (Padma Malineem, 2.6.11 and 12) for Lakshmi. O Jataveda Agni, invoke that Goddess Lakshmi for me.

Dhanalakshmi

In mythology, the goddess Lakshmi is portrayed as possessing special powers. The image of Laxmi is adorned with various gold ornaments. Gold is found in nature as pure metal and has been a symbol of wealth since ancient times. Hence, from a practical point of view, gold was considered the true representative of Laxmi. Some researchers say that gold came to the earth's surface from the deepest regions of our planet.

Dhana means prosperity of wealth in the form of money or gold, which gives inner strength to humans. She holds a pot with rolling coins. Cattle and horses were also a form of wealth.

*Ashvadaayi godaayi dhanadaayi mahaadhane, dhanam me jushatam devi sarva
kaamaanshcha dehi me. 2. 6, adhika amntra 3. (Kashyap 857)*

Meaning, O goddess of great wealth! Giver of the horse, giver of cow, and money, may I always have enough money. Be pleased with me and give me all the desired things.

*Upaitu Maam Devasakhah Keertishcha Maninaa Saha
Praadurbhutoasmi Raashtreasmin Keerti Mriddhim Dadaatu Me. 2. 6. 7. (Kashyap 857)*

May the friend of gods Kubera (Devasakha), the lord of wealth with Mani (Manibhadra - a yaksha, the treasurer of Kubera), and Daksha Prajapati's daughter Kirti, born in this land, get to me, to get wealth, fame and prosperity. The Devas serve

Lakshmi along with their consorts.

Lakshmi relates to divinity and auspiciousness, whereas Kubera is associated with material prosperities acquired from wealth, opulence, and riches. Laskmi is of divine origin, for she is an auspicious energy of Vishnu, whereas Kubera received the status of demigod through his struggle and Shiva's blessings. Devasakah -the god's friend Kubera, is said to be a friend of Lord Mahadeva. Lakshmi agrees to reside forever with Kubera to achieve riches.

Dhanyalakshmi

Dhanya Lakshmi (Grain Lakshmi) is the form of Lakshmi that represents the perennial source of life, sustenance, well-being, and longevity, the food grains as wealth. Dhanya Lakshmi, in this manifestation, facilitates agricultural wealth and resources to adherents of an abundance of food all through the year. She holds a paddy sheaf as a symbolic accessory and other accessories.

Pashunaamrupamannasyamayi Srihishrayataamyashah. 2. 6. 10 (Kashyap 857)

I approach you to fulfill my desires for the happiness of the cattle and food to be granted to me by you, O goddess Sri.

Dhanyamghanampashumbahuputra-labhamshatasamvatsaramdeergamayuhu. 2.6., adhika mantra 9 (Kashyap 858)

Also, it bestows me the wealth of grains, cattle, many offspring, and the long life that lasts a hundred years.

Gajalakshmi

Gajalakshmi, with elephants, is prominent for awarding economic strength. Elephant Lakshmi is the royal class goddess and the giver of abundant animal wealth, such as cattle, horses, and elephants of regal splendor. According to Rig Veda, the earliest Hindu scripture, she holds two lotuses in her hands as she is the daughter of Ksheera Sagara, who emerged during Samudra Manthana. According to Hinduism, Gajalakshmi restored the potent lost by Indra (King of the devas) during the Samudra Manthana and, hence, a protector of the power of royalty. She is flanked and worshipped by celestial elephants.

Lakssmiirdivyaigajendraimanigannakhacitaihisnaapitaahema-kumbhaih | Nityamsaapadmahastaamama vasatugrhesarvamaangalyayukata. 2.6.17, adhika mantra (Kashyap 858)

Mother Lakshmi, bathed by the best of celestial elephants, Divya Gajendra, is decorated with various gems and ornaments. They pour water from the golden pitcher Hema Kumbham, which symbolizes monsoon showers. Lakshmi, who is eternal, holds a lotus in her hands and is adorned with all the auspicious attributes. O Mother, please reside in my house and make it auspicious by your presence.

Gajalakshmi, the Embodiment of Sri, is the Ruling power in all beings; She is the power behind Agni, Vayu, Surya, and Vasus, the celestial beings. She is the power behind Indra, Brihaspati, and Varuna (the God of Water). She is the all-pervading essence behind everything.” 2.6.5, adhika mantra. (Kashyap 857).

Santana Lakshmi

Santana Lakshmi is the bestower of offspring, with windfalls of healthy offspring and happy marital prospects. This refers to family aspirations, which are the basic unit of life. She is the goddess of progeny, the treasure of family life, giving good health and long life. A baby symbolizes her on her lap.

*Putra-pautradhanamdhaanyamhasty-ashvadi-gave ratham | ...
Prajanaambhavasimaataaayushmantamkarotumaam. 2.6 4, adhika mantra
(Kashyap 857)*

O Mother, bestow us with children and grandchildren to continue our lineage. Let your auspiciousness manifest wealth, grains, cattle, and many offspring who live happily for a hundred years. (Sri Suktam - In Sanskrit, with meaning from Rig Veda appendices)

Dhairyalakshmi

Dhairyalakshmi is the bestower of infinite courage and blesses with utmost bravery and courage to overcome any disastrous situation in life. She removes fear and anxiety and gives inner strength and stability to overcome the formidable adversaries in war or the difficulties in life and emerge victorious. She is symbolized by holding a sword or bow and arrow.

*Runa rogaadidaaridyapaapakshudapamrutyavah
Bhayasokhamanstapanasyantu mama sarvadaa (Kashyap, 2018)*

Remove all the debts, illness, poverty, sins, hunger, accidental death, fear, sorrow, and keen distress of mine that must be destroyed by you permanently from my house

through your grace.

*Gandhadwaramduraadharshaamnityapushtaamkareeshineem |
Ishvareemsarvabhutaanaamtaamihopahvayeshriyam.2.6.9 (Kashyap 857)*

She is like the source of fragrances(pleasantness) in a place filled with filth (a metaphor for the sorrows in life), which is unapproachable. She is inviolable and always nourishes like a mother, having abundant things. She is like the Mother Goddess (Eshwari) to all beings and lets the flow from her bring charisma, long life, and health.

Vidya Lakshmi

Vidyalakshmi- In this manifestation, goddess Lakshmi brings proficiency and understanding of knowledge. She is the giver of all-round education and knowledge of arts and science and ascends all the Seeds of differentiation to a higher spiritual plane. Like Sarasvati, this manifestation holds a book in one of the hands.

*Varshenthuteyvibhaavari divo abhrasyavidhyutah
Rohamtusarvabeejanyaava Brahma dwishojahi 2.6, adhikamantra 15 (Kashyap 858)*

By your mercy, let the lightning clouds rain during the night and day as the source of all.

Such that all the types of seeds get germinated to a spiritual plane, destroying the hatred.

Vijayalakshmi

The mighty goddess bestows all-encompassing victory in life, not only in war but all difficulties in life in conquering the lower nature. The mighty Vijaya Lakshmi cherishes life with stability and courage to attain success and honor. She inspires devotees with hope and inspiration. Symbolically, she holds a noose, sword, and shield in her hands. She is a supporter of positive attitudes in the seekers of spirituality.

Ashva-Puurvaam Ratha-Madhyaam Hastinaada-Prabodhiniim 2.6.3 (Kashyap 856)

Vijayalakshmi, on her arrival as victorious, is heralded by horses in the front and chariots in the middle, followed by the awakening sound of trumpeting elephants. I pray the goddess of wealth to come near me. Let the divine mother be pleased. (Sri Suktam - In Sanskrit, with meaning from Rig Vedaappendices)

Gajalakshmi in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism

Gajalakshmi in Hinduism

Gajalakshmi represents wealth, prosperity, power, strength, grace, and authority. Among the Astalakshmi manifestations, the Gajalakshmi, eulogized as the mother of all three worlds, is listed as fourth in the order. She is with two hands holding lotus or four armed in some temple representations along with Abhaya and Varada mudras. She is depicted as bathed by two white elephants with their upturned trunk and pouring water on her head. She is worshiped as Mother Earth, a concept that has remained the epicenter of Indian heritage and culture. In India, mountains, rivers, trees, animals, and nature are honored and revered, seeing these objects as manifest divine creations. All Gods venerated her.

*Shriiman-Manda Kattaakssa Labdha Vibhava Brahmendra-Ganggaadharaam |
Tvaam Trai-Lokya Kuttumbiniim Sarasijaam Vande Mukunda-Priyaam.2.6.adhika
mantra,17 (Kashyap 858)*

Sri Sukta describes how even Brahma, Indra, and Gangadhara (Shiva) praised the water-born goddess as she was the mother of all three worlds and consort of Mukunda (Vishnu).

*Varshenthuteyvibhaavari divo abhrasyavidhyutah
Rohantusarvabeejanyaava Brahma dwishojahi,2.6., adhika mantra, 15 (Kashyap 858)*

By your mercy, let the lightning and clouds rain at night and day so that all seeds germinate. This means abundant wealth everywhere, and the source of all hatred gets destroyed.

Gajalakshmi panel from Kailash temple, Ellora, Maharashtra (Plate. 3), a rock-cut Shiva temple built in the 8th century CE by the Rastrakuta dynasty. It has an enormous panel of Gajalakshmi figures. She is two-armed and holding a lotus (her hands are damaged), but the elbow position indicates she has a lotus in her hands and is seated on a giant lotus that has emerged from a lotus pond. The elephants are positioned on a slab and not on a lotus. The Gajalakshmi panel shows four celestial elephants, which are symbolic of the earth's four cardinal points and could indicate the universal mother of prosperity. Elephants are holding pots in their trunk. Another Gajalakshmi panel (Plate. 4) above the Ardhanariswara figure in Kailash temple, Ellora, depicts how even Gangadhara Shiva worshipped Gajalakshmi.

*Dhanam-Agnir-Dhanam Vaayur-DhanamSuuryo DhanamVasuh |
Dhanam-Indro Varunnam Dhanam-Ashnute.2.6. adhika mantra, 5. (Kashyap 858)*

“Goddess, it is due to you, Agni (Lord of Fire), Vaayu (Lord of Wind), Surya (Sun god), Vasus (eight elemental gods), Indra (king of the gods), Brihaspati (Deva guru), and Varuna (God of Rains and water) are enjoying the wealth.” (Sri Suktam - In Sanskrit, with meaning from Rig Veda appendices)

All the gods are depicted in the top part, praising the goddess. Two gods with mukuta and halo are depicted as dwarapalas.

The Gajalakshmi panel from Mahabalipuram (Plate. 5) shows her holding the lotus in their hands, seated on a lotus, and resting her feet on a lotus. The depiction of clouds hints about the upper world devaloka. Two giant celestial elephants are pouring water on her. Four female figures standing with plates and pots are serving the goddess. They are yakshis, consorts of yakshas, the attendants of Kubera, as they show the elaborate mukuta and stand on the higher abode.

Sri Sukta associates Lakshmi with Kubera, the lord of the Yakshas, who was called Devasakha – the friend of Gods. Kubera Yaksha was the protector of wealth and monuments. Yakshas are the supernatural beings and attendants of Kubera. They are depicted as full-breasted and big-hipped fertility goddesses serving Gajalakshmi, symbolizing the energy of growth’s potent power.

Upaitu Maam Devasakhah Keertishcha Maninaa Saha|

Praadurbhutoasmi Raashtreasmin Keerti Mriddhim Dadaatu Me 2.6.7 (Kashyap 857)

May the friend of gods Kubera (Devasakha), the lord of wealth with Mani (Manibhadra - a yaksha, the treasurer of Kubera), and Daksha Prajapati’s daughter Kirti, born in this land, get to me, to get wealth, fame and prosperity. The Devas serve Lakshmi along with their consorts.

Gajalakshmi in Jainism

The entrance panel is with Gajalakshmi in the colossal Gommateshwara Bahubali shrine of Jainism at Shravanabelagola Karnataka, which belongs to the 10th Century Ganga architecture (Plate. 6) and is carved in granite stone. Mother Lakshmi is bathed by the best of celestial elephants - Divya Gajendra, which are decorated with various gems and ornaments. They are pouring water from the golden pitcher -Hema Kumbham. Gajalakshmi is holding a lotus in both hands and seated on a lotus. The well-adorned celestial elephants in the action of Abhisheka are depicted on a stone platform, not on a lotus (Plate. 7).

Gajalakshmi in the Buddhist Stupas

A rare depiction of Gajalakshmi, the goddess of abundance, prosperity, and good luck, is in standing posture in one of the medallions of the Barhut stupa railing pillar. It began in 250 BCE by King Ashoka and was completed with gateways, railings, and Torana decorations during the Sunga period in 72 BCE. The medallion is now preserved in the Indian Museum Kolkata. Barhut is in the district Satna, in the Northeastern part of Madhya Pradesh. The name of the Shunga king, Dhanabhuti, is engraved in one of the inscriptions of the Stupa. The short inscription engraved on the top part of the pillar is in characters of the 1st century of the Sunga period in Brahmi and Prakrit languages. The translation reads 'This pillar is the gift of Muthuladasa (hailing from Meragiri). It is interesting to note that there is no mention of either Gajalakshmi or Mahamaya in the inscription. It only mentions the donor who contributed to the pillar-making with the picture.

An interesting feature in this panel is that the two-armed Gajalakshmi is standing on a lotus. Elephants on either side are on a lotus base, pouring water (abhisheka) on the goddess from Kalasha in their trunk. The flowers in the pot and her hand are the rare and auspicious type of Himalayan Mahameru Pushpam, also called Arya poo, commonly depicted in ancient Buddhist art. The figure of Gajalakshmi is positioned on a raised lotus from a decorated pot /Kalasha, also called Bhadrachata, with petals on the neck part of the kalasha and circular designs below, probably symbolic of coins. She holds the long stalk of the flower in her left hand, rising from the kalasha. This could also be a prototype of an archaeological representation of Gajalakshmi, typifying the early Hindu idea of the goddess of prosperity as a motif. Gajalakshmi was also the protector of the power and wealth of royalty, so she was installed in monuments sponsored by kings. Kalasha, which contains primordial waters, is used in Brahmanical and Buddhist architecture but with different significance. Buddha Mata, also associated with the white elephant in her dream episode, was a historical figure. But the reference in this medallion for Gajalakshmi's emergence symbolizes a Kalasha, the water pot, not a pond. This may support the analysis that the goddess depicted is Gajalakshmi and not Buddhamata, as it bears no reference to birthing nor a yakshi, a tree spirit as Gajalakshmi is adorned with a costume.

Gajalakshmi is represented in a standing posture in the ancient Indian punch-marked coins from Ujjain. The celestial elephants are positioned on lotuses with long stalks indicating the higher abode. Coin of Azilises (Plate. 9) showing Gajalakshmi standing on a lotus in the Coin of Gandhara, 1st century BCE, photographed at the British Museum.

Significance of the Elephants and Multiple Lotuses in Gajalakshmi Panels

Association of Elephants

Elephants are a powerful image of prosperity and royalty. Airavata is a white elephant that carries the deity Indra, also called 'Abhra-Matanga,' meaning "elephant of the clouds"; 'Elephants are also connected to grey rain clouds to bring bountiful harvests are considered sacred, auspicious and are a symbol of royal power.

The unique feature of Gajalakshmi is that the celestial elephants worship her. The elephant is an ancient symbol of sovereign power, rain god Indra, thunder, and clouds. Land fertility and rainfall were symbols that attached white elephants to Gajalakshmi. Elephants symbolize the qualities of good government, dignity, intelligence, and the benefit of peace, bountiful harvest, and rainfall. Airavata, the white elephant that emerged during Samudra Manthana, was chosen by the rain god Indra as his vahana. The white elephants pair Airavata and the female Abhramuare compared to the clouds that sprinkle sumptuous rainfall, which was the source of bounty in the harvest. And the clouds showered rain in celebration when Gajalakshmi form manifested. The abundance of plant and animal wealth flourished in the region wherever Gajalakshmi was installed.

Lakshmi's manifestation as Gajalakshmi is given Deva Snana/ ceremonial bath by the celestial elephants. When installed for the first time, the idol of the deities was celebrated as a mark of the birth or her emergence. The trumpet of an elephant is compared to the sound of thunders, and an elephant sprinkling a pot full of water is compared to the copious rainfall. Gajalakshmi is the form of the goddess who stands for royalty status and the strength of animal wealth. Some panels have four elephants (Fig. 3) that convey a significant meaning of the four cardinal directions.

The Elephant in Buddhism

Elephants are the largest land animals on the planet. Its physical strength supposedly indicates mental strength and responsibility as guardians of the earth. In Buddhism, the white elephants carry special significance. Before the delivery, the mother of Buddha, Maha Maya, dreamt that a white elephant offered a lotus, which was interpreted as having conceived a child who would become either a world ruler or a Buddha. Buddhists believed that Buddha was reincarnated from white elephants in heaven. Elephants are frequently represented as Buddhas in Buddhist texts. Samantabhadra, the bodhisattva of universal virtue, is mounted on a six-tusked white elephant on lotus flowers. Some believe that the white elephant mount of Samantabhadra was the same

elephant that appeared to Queen Maya, the mother of the Buddha, to herald his birth.

In the Gajalakshmi panels in Buddhist stupas, elephants are depicted as standing on a full-bloom lotus with a slender stalk or the auspicious Mahameru Pushpa, which blooms in the mountains. In Buddhist stupas, the installation of Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance and fortune, reflected the Buddhist monasteries' inspiration for accumulating wealth and financial independence. Gajalakshmi's image became one of the popular visual themes carved on their monuments.

Lotus

Lakshmi is eulogized as:

Sarasijanilaye Saroja haste, Padmapriye, Padmaanane, Padmadalaayatakshi.

Meaning – Seated on a lotus, the one who holds a lotus in her hand, Lover of lotus, lotus faced and eyes like lotus petals, and so on.

In Indian art, gods and goddesses seated cross-legged or in royal ease posture on a lotus base symbolized the inner potential, a symbol of immortality and spiritual unfolding. Lakshmi sitting on a lotus signifies the divine status, the origin of birth, and cosmic life from the water. Holding a lotus bud or flower in hand means the blooming of material and spiritual wealth. Indian art stands for traditional values of spiritual concepts and the beauty of radiating petals that open their immaculate petals to the Sun. Lotus also symbolizes a metaphor for creation, fertility, and abundance. It is a synonym for perfection in philosophical concepts of purity as it does not show mud stains.

One of the Torana pillars of the Sanchi stupa gateway (Plate. 11) has the beautiful figure of Gajalakshmi, well adorned with a long costume on her legs and hence may not be suggestive of a yakshi who is depicted in a nude form in stupas. Strangely, in the Buddhist stupas, elephants are also depicted standing on the long-stalked lotus near her chest region. It is a unique way of conveying some information. Airavata, the white elephant, symbolizes the cloud as he is the vahana of the rain god Indra. An elephant standing on a lotus at a higher level suggests the zone is the firmament of celestial beings. The elephants' pots carry pure water, the seeds of plants, and gold pieces so that Gajalakshmi felt at home and comfortable in the land where plants grew well and contained precious metals and gems.

Conclusion

The emergence of Lakshmi and her various manifestations have been an essential part of Hindu mythology for thousands of years. The literary source tracing the emergence of Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth is in an appended part of Rig Veda, which is documented as Sri Sukta and is essential for understanding Lakshmi's significance and manifestations. Understanding the Astalakshmi forms is vital to appreciate the importance of the Gajalakshmi goddess in Hindu tradition. The number of carved images of Goddess Gajalakshmi scattered in various temples also supports the popular cult of mother goddess worship from ancient Vedic times. Gajalakshmi panels represent the source of perpetual ecological and cultural resources, abundance in life, and the importance of using wealth to better the world. It was favored by royal dynasties for the prosperity of their land and hence installed in the major monuments sponsored by them. When one examines the medallion of Gajalakshmi objectively, applying iconography, history, and its evolution through the passage of architectural representations, the interpretation will have a strong foundation of Hindu religious values.

Gajalakshmi is a goddess in Hindu mythology who is associated with wealth, prosperity, and good fortune in the Jain monuments. The stupa, on the other hand, is a hemispherical structure used in Buddhist traditions for meditation and worship. The balustrade and torana are often adorned with sculptures and carvings depicting Yakshis, the tree spirits, in nude form, but Gajalakshmi is presented as a goddess adorned with a costume. While the worship of Gajalakshmi is primarily associated with Hinduism, it is possible that her image could be incorporated into the decorative elements of a stupa torana, particularly in areas where Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted. However, the specific intention of Gajalakshmi imagery in a stupa would depend on the cultural and religious traditions of the community that created it.

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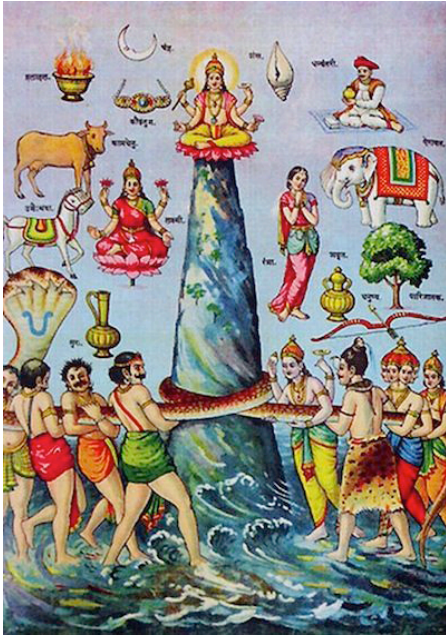


Plate.1. Samudra Manthan and the emergence of Lakshmi

(Picture courtesy: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/d/db/20190304050554%21Sagar_Manthan.jpg)

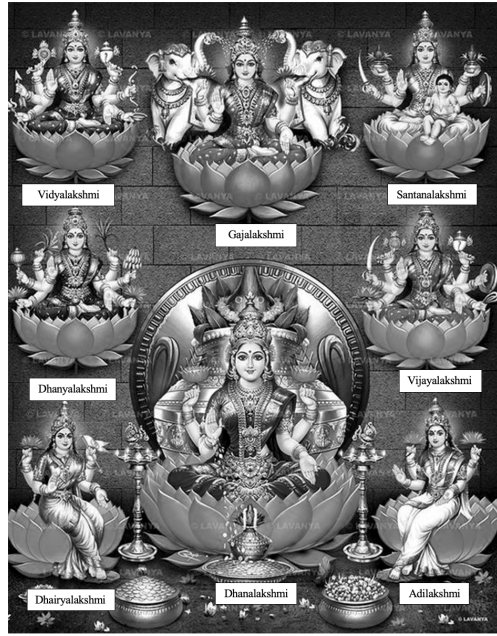


Plate.2. The eight manifestations of Lakshmi as Asta Lakshmi

(Picture courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/Garuda-Photos-Goddess-Astalaxmi-Lakshmi/dp/B09HCJ38CB>)



Plate.3. Gajalakshmi in Kailash rock-cut temple at Ellora, Maharashtra, 8th century CE.
 (Picture courtesy from Wikimedia Commons)



Plate.4. Another Gajalakshmi panel above the Ardhanarishwara figure in Kailash temple, Ellora.
(Picture courtesy: Christel Pilz)



Plate.5. Gajalakshmi from Varaha cave temple, Mahabalipuram, Pallava art, 7th century CE.
(Picture courtesy: Varaha Cave Temple, Wikipedia)



Plate.6. Gajalakshmi above monolithic gateway door lintel, from the Vindhyagiri hill Jain shrine Sravanabelagola (Picture courtesy: From Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository)



Plate.7. Zoomed picture of Gajalakshmi, believed to be the finest Gajalakshmi relief in the country.

(Picture courtesy: Gajalakshmi,Shravanabelagola, Wikipedia)



Plate.8. Gajalakshmi from the medallion of Barhut stupa, 100 BCE, Indian Museum, Calcutta.

(Picture courtesy: Varaha Cave Temple, Wikipedia)



Plate.9. Coin of Azilises showing Gajalakshmi standing on a lotus
1st Century BCE

(Picture courtesy:Gajalakshmi, Wikimedia Commons)



Plate.10. Goddess Gajalakshmi at the Torana of Sanchi Buddhist Stupa, Madhya Pradesh, 1st century BCE.

(Picture courtesy: From Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository)



Plate.11. A zoomed picture of Gajalakshmi at Sanchi Buddhist Stupa, Madhya Pradesh, 1 BCE.