



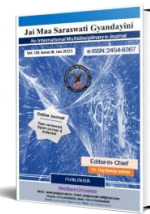
Jai Maa Saraswati Gyandayini

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(Peer-reviewed, Open Access & Indexed)

Journal home page: www.jmsjournals.in, ISSN: 2454-8367

Vol. 08, Issue-III, Jan. 2023



Antiquities of Pratihara Sculptures with Special Reference of Kannauj

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KEYWORDS

Kanyakubaja, Mahodanagar, antiquities, society, culture, sculpture, religious, folk, depiction, inscriptions, archeological, excavation, tolerance, observation, warrior, entertainment, Shalhanjika, Markandey Purana, Aprajitaprichha, Gopath Brahman.

ABSTRACT

Kannauj is one among the most ancient place of India having rich archaeological and cultural heritage. The ancient name of Kannauj is Kanyakubja or Mahodanagar. Kannauj is also known as the main place of war in the 'Tripartite Struggle' between the Gurjara Pratihara, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas. This war ultimately ended in favour of the Pratihara ruler Nagabhata II. They made the city the capital of the Pratihara State, which ruled for nearly three centuries. Under the Pratiharas, Kannauj reached the zenith of its power, learning and culture. The entire sculpture obtained from excavation of Kannauj presents an excellent outline of society and culture of Pratihara Period. The sculptures found in the excavation can be classify under the different categories -1 Religious sculptures, 2 - Related to folk life sculptures, 3- Sculptures related to animal- birds and nature, which reflects the religious and supernatural life of Pratihara Period.

Introduction:

Kannauj (Kanyakubja) is an ancient and important city of northern India. It has also attracted the attention of scholars, archaeologist and historians. Kannauj is one among the most ancient place of India having rich archaeological and cultural heritage. The ancient name of this place is Kanyakubja or Mahodanagar.¹ The Aryans settled in this region who were close allies of Kurus. This region rose into great prominence during the Mahabharata period. The name Panchala being used for the entire region. Panchala figures as the tenth in the list of the sixteen premier states (Mahajanpadas) in the period of Mahavira and Buddha. In classical India, it served as the centre of imperial Indian dynasties. The earliest of these was Maukhari dynasty, and later, emperor Harsha of the Vardhan dynasty.² The city later come under the Gaharwala dynasty and under the rule of Govind Chandra, the city reached "unprecedented glory".³ Kannauj was also known as the main place of war in the 'tripartite struggle' between the Gurjara - Pratiharas, the Palas and the Rashtrakutas. This tripartite struggle for Kannauj lingered for almost for two centuries and this was ultimately ended in favour of the Pratihara ruler Nagabhata II.⁴ Those made the city the capital of the Pratihara State, which ruled for nearly three centuries.

Objectives:

The main objectives of this research paper is to know the society and culture through the sculptures of Pratihara Period.

Of the great city of Kannauj, which for many hundred years was the Hindu capital of Northern India, the existing remains are most important source of that Period. According to tradition, the ancient city

contained 84 wards of which 25 are still existing within the limits of the present town.⁵ The entire sculptures obtained from the excavation of Kannauj presents an excellent outline of society and culture of Pratihara Period. The sculptures found in the excavation can be classify under the different categories -1- Religious sculptures, 2 - Related to folk life sculptures, 3- Sculptures related to animal- birds and nature.

Religious Sculptures

Found in the excavation of Kannauj and stored in the Government Archaeological Museum, Kannauj, there is a wonderful series of Pratihara Period religious Sculptures. From the observations of sculptures it is known that there exists a series of sculptures related to Hindu, Buddhism and Jainism. Among the Hindu sculptures - Brahma idols, Vishnu idols, Shiva idols, Ganapati idols, Surya idols, Kartikeya idols, Navagraha idols, Ashtadikpala idols, Vidyadhara idols, Nagas idols, Gandharva idols, Jain and Buddha idols are prominent. The study of these sculptures gives an understanding of religious tolerance in the contemporary society and culture. Only some special idols are being analysed in this research paper.

Under the Pratiharas, Kannauj reached the zenith of its power, learning and culture. Some of the finest example of 8th and 9th century stone sculptural art are shown here. A beautiful sculpture of the Varaha Avtar of Vishnu obtained from Mubarakpur mound, Kannauj and stored in the Kannauj Musuem. This sculpture is representing the beautiful idol of the Pratihara period, 8th-9th century (Fig.1). For the welfare of the universe, Vishnu took the incarnation of Varaha.⁶ In the same sequence, the statue of pratihara period Saptmatrika, which is stored in front

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53724/jmsg/v8n3.03>

Received 06th Nov. 2022; Accepted 15th Nov. 2022; Available online 23rd Jan. 2023

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entrance of Kannauj museum is very beautiful, which represents the Shakta statue of Pratihara Period. It is related to 8th - 9th centuries (Fig-2). In the Markandeya Purana, there is a description of Saptmatrika fighting with Andhakasur.⁷ Similarly, in the sequence of these idols, Jain and Buddhist idols are also visible. Under which the Jain idol of Parshwanatha (Fig-3) and the Buddha idol (Fig -4) are very remarkable. It is clear from the observation of these sculptures that there were religious tolerance in the contemporary society.

displayed in Kannauj Museum. A woman is depicted with a mirror in her hand (Fig - 6). From the observation of the idol it appears that she is engaged in cosmetics. Only on separate interpretation of women of each class can be introduction of the former condition of the women's society be obtained.⁹ These female sculptures are the mirror of the contemporary society and are a powerful medium to know the public life.

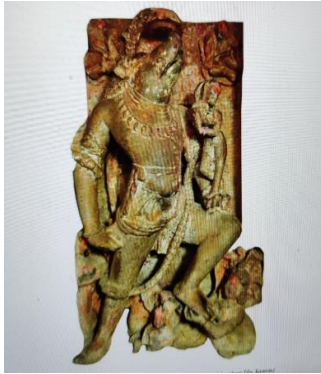


Fig. 1. Varaha Sculpture, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj

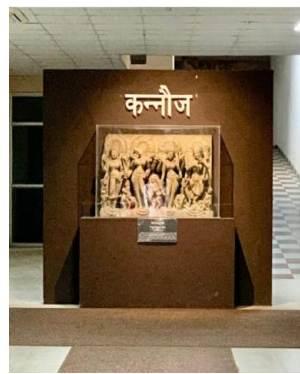


Fig.2. Saptmatrika Sculpture, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.



Fig. 5. Dancing Women, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.



Fig.6. Women using Cosmetics, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.

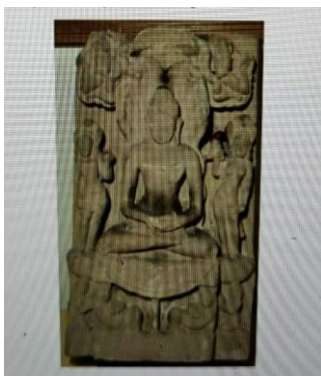


Fig.3. Parshwanath Sculpture, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.



Fig.4. Buddha Sculpture, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj.

Warriors and war are very important steps for the expansion of the empire. In the victory of the king, his army and commander have an important contribution. In the Kannauj Museum, a brave warrior (Ashwarohi) depicted. This has been done by Pratihara craftsman to inculcate devotion towards the country. Entertainment is such an activity in which the participants gets pleasure and mind becomes calm. Some of the idols of Kannauj Museum, appears to have been placed for entertainment. In the same sequence bone made backgammon (chousar) (Fig - 8) and stone made dice (Fig-9) of Pratihara period can be seen. This is known form the observation of objects of these entertainment that in the then society, how aware was the human about himself and how alert was he about the health of the body.

Sculptures related to folk life

Folk culture is seen at every step in the folk life. The seed of folk culture and all the cultures of the world is the same, this seed is folk culture.⁸ The depiction of society and culture related to folk life is found in folk literature. In folk literature, the heart of man speaks. These sculptures of folk life obtained from the excavation of Kannauj understand not only the folk tradition prevalent in the society, but also their relation with the Pratihara era and creation of the system.

In the series of sculptures excavated at Kannauj and stored in the Kannauj Museum, Sculptures related to folk lives of Pratihara period are visible. Sculpture of a woman in a dance posture from the Pratihara period of the 8th century has been depicted one who is engrossed in performing some dance posture by touching the feet with the left hand and beautiful ornaments adorn (Fig -5). The observation of this statue gives knowledge of the tradition of dance and music in Kannauj region. Similarly, different types of independent female statue are also



Fig.9. Dice, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj



Fig.8. Bone made Backgammon, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj



Fig.7. Warrior Sculpture, Pratihara Period, From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj

Sculptures related to Animals, Birds and Nature: - Man is an integral part of nature and the animal world and is also the main dimension of that nature. Animals and humans had become related to

each other in terms of need of food and sense of security.¹⁰ From the observation of Sculptures stored in Government Archaeological Museum it is known that it gives knowledge of different types of animals like Taurs (Brishabha), Leo (Singha), Horse, Mahisha, Garuna, Matsya, Kurma, Varaha etc. And among the birds like Swan, Duck, Peacock, Parrot, etc. From the observation of Pratihara period nature can be divided into three forms: - Nature, depiction in its original form- such as lotus flower, creeper vine and branches, Mango trees and Kalpabriksha. Second depiction of nature in Symbolic form- such as river goddess (Ganga and Yamuna), water god and sky god (Vidyadhar, Gandharwa, Kinnar, Ashtadikpal). Third depiction of nature in human nature form- such as knowing nature through Rasa.

From this point of view, a lion statue stored in Kannauj Museum appears to be very aggressive. Roaring in this idol, his wavy hair and power can be clearly seen. Lion had pressed an elephant with his feet which is an indicator of victory. (Fig-10). This sculpture is of the pratihara period and in the Vishnudharmotrapurana, the lion is described as vehicle of Mahishasura Mardini¹¹. Similarly, in the Kannauj Museum a gracefully ornamented elephant (Gaja) figure has been seen. (Fig-11) Every yard of Aishwarya and wealth has been accepted as the vehicle of Indra and Indrani, the king of deities. The elephant symbolising wealth and prosperity has been accepted as vehicle of Lord Indra and Indrani.¹²

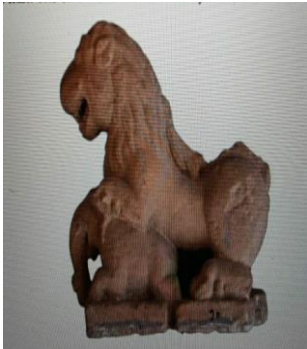


Fig.10. Lion Sculpture, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj



Fig. 11. Elephant Sculpture, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj

Lotus is the most important decoration of flowers and leaves in the original nature illustration, which is the symbol of the origin of the individual, human and the world. The lotus is a symbol of the most importance in Indian art, religion and philosophy. Brahma, the creator the whole world, grew on the lotus of vishnu's naval.¹³ The octagonal lotus can be clearly seen in the aura circle (Prabhamandal) of the Surya sculpture stored in Kannauj Museum (Fig - 12). Similarly, the religious and artistic importance of the mango tree is very ancient. In ancient period, stupas and pillars depicted 'Shalbhanjika' holding mango tree branches.¹⁴ A statue of Shalbhanjika stored in the Kannauj Museum has been found from 'Jankhat' village of Kannauj. The Idol is shown holding a branch of the mango tree (Fig-13). The face of this idol is broken and it appears to be the ruins of a temple.¹⁵



Fig.12. Octagonal Lotus, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj



Fig. 13. Shalbhanjika holding with mango tree, Pratihara Period From Govt. Archaeological Museum, Kannauj

Excavation work done by Mr. K.K Sinha in Kannauj in 1955-56 A.D. has yielded complete remains to a depth of 12 meters which are divided in four periods - First Period- Painted Grey ware, red ware and black ware and red colored ware. Second period- Black Shielded Pottery and remains of buildings made of bricks. Third Period-Kushan Period artefacts and old ruins. Fourth Period- Medieval Relics. In the year 1974, Government Archaeological Museum, Kannauj was established in Kannauj city. In which archaeological material such as sculptures, coins, inscriptions, pots and ornaments obtained from the excavation of mounds of Kannauj and surrounding areas have been collected. It is a powerful medium to present the ancient glories of Pratihara Period.

So, it is obvious that the sculptures obtained from the excavation of Kannauj and stored in Government Archaeological Museum Kannauj reflects the religious and supernatural life of the Pratihara Period. Through these idols, the craftsmen have shown the religious tolerance, independent social consciousness and attachment towards the common people of the kings of the Pratihara period. Through the sculptures, we are able to know the social and culture of any nation and region. Excavation work should also be done on some other mounds of Kannauj so that the complete picture of ancient glory of this cultural city of Pratihara Period can come in front of the people.

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