

A Monograph on the Elephant-headed God Ganesha: The Mythological Concept and Distinct Iconography

Sumana Dutta

ABSTRACT

Ganesha is one of the most important deities of the Hindu pantheon. Worshipping him at the beginning of all the rituals has made him popular than many other divinities. He is widely revered as the '*remover of obstacles*'. He is worshipped all over India and commands such a distinguished position that it is essential to worship him before the commencement of every act considered good life, whether religious, social, cultural, academic or commercial. *Ganapati* is worshipped by both *Vaishnavas* (devotees of *Vishnu*) and *Saivites* (devotees of *Shiva*). *Ganesha* is the God of Good Luck and Auspiciousness and is the Dispeller of problems and obstacles. He is also worshipped as the God of wisdom, wealth, health, celibacy, fertility and happiness. The rise of *Ganapatya* sect was a significant departure from the traditional *Saivism* and it coincided with the rise of tantric form of worship in ancient India some time during the post Gupta period. *Ganesha* appears as a distinct deity in a clearly recognizable form beginning in the 4th to 5th centuries A.D., during the Gupta Period. Today, *Ganesha* is one of the most worshipped divinities in India. The devotion of *Ganesha* is widely diffused and it extends to *Jains*, *Buddhists* and others beyond India. Several texts relate mythological anecdotes associated with his birth and exploits, and explain his distinct iconography. There are various names, forms and incarnations of *Ganesha* in many Puranas. The idols and temples of *Ganesha* are found all over the world. The present paper will discuss the mythological concept of his birth and distinct symbolism of *Ganesha* cited in the Puranas.

Keywords: *Ganesha, Mythological concept, Birth, Iconography, Puranas.*

Senior Research Fellow- UGC, Department of Museology; University of Calcutta; Kolkata, West Bengal, India

E-mail: sumanadutta50@gmail.com