

Ganesha- Mythologies and Reflections of the Elephant-headed God in Modern Popular Culture in India

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ABSTRACT

Ganesha or, as is popularly referred- *Ganapati* is widely revered across India as well as several other countries of South-east Asia traditionally. Generally associated with Hinduism, the devotion towards Ganesha is broadly diffused and extends to Jainism and Buddhism as well. Widely believed and revered to be the remover of obstacles and the patron of arts and sciences, wisdom and knowledge, Ganesha is worshipped at the beginning of all the rituals and ceremonies mostly associated with specific Hindu customs. Also respected for blessing the intelligentsia and process of learning, several texts and mythologies, over the years, have highlighted this distinct personality and its well-established place amidst the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. With time, the deity has also earned a place amidst the popular culture of India- travelling from its traditional concept to a much more varied and widely recognised popular symbol. This paper attempts to highlight this specific identity- established across the last century and more importantly over the last couple of decades- imparting a significant global identity to the concept of Ganesha. The paper also attempts to show this identity reflecting a closer man-environment relationship which, in an inexplicable manner, reflects a connection with the traditional identity of the worshippers to a region or a habitat on one hand and quite interestingly, also reflects cross-cultural connections and social acceptance of various age and caste groups on the other. The paper also highlights the extensive use of the identity of Ganesha across animation and children's media in India- creating new venues of belief, entertainment and storytelling.