

Lion and Elephant Motif or Gaja-Simha and the *Gajamauktikas*

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Introduction

The poetic verses devoted to the lion-elephant war in the literature as well as in the epigraphs mention the final victory of lions, resulting in the obtainment of *gajamauktikas*, *gajamuktās* or *kunjaramanis*, the treasure of precious pearls of elephants by them. These lustrous and beautiful pearls are always described to be found in the foreheads of elephants. The poetic conceptions of lion's victory over elephants, described in the classical Sanskrit literature and epigraphic records appear to be the basis of lion-elephant fights shown in later plastic art as the 'Gaja-Simha' motif. The motif is usually thought of as decorative in manner. But, it appears to be the perfect metaphor of natural phenomenon of rain. The motif beautifully conveys the idea of rain bearing clouds, thunder and hailstone shower by using the metaphor of lions as thunder, elephants as rain clouds and hailstone showers as *gajamauktikas*, the mythical elephant-pearls. In this article, an attempt is made to understand different poetic, inscriptional, folk inspirations and their symbolism that is reflected in the Gaja-Simha motif, which is mostly seen in the rock-cut architecture, temple architecture and also in other decorative embellishments.

The lion and elephant motif is one of the most artistic sculptural motifs seen in temple and rock-cut architecture. It is mostly known as Gaja-Simha or Gaja-Vyāla or Gaja-Viāla and Gaja-Śardula. While describing the motif, C. Sivaramamurti (1970: 79) mentions that the motif was a favourite subject in North-east Indian art during the medieval period. He also informs its presence in Java, at Chadi Mendut, on the throne of Buddha. The author further points out its poetic narrative references from ancient Indian literature. According to him, the poetic idea portrays the beasts' king lion jumping, attacking and enjoying the bursting of the head-temple, the most inaccessible part of the body of an elephant. The poetic account tells that due to the attack of the lion, rare pearls are scattered from the broken temples of the elephant. This poetic conception accordingly got transferred into sculptural form of a lion and the elephant motif is repeatedly utilized in the architecture and in the royal furniture such as back rest of thrones, flanking on either side. The motif occurs frequently in the late Gupta and Pala sculptures.

The lions and the mighty elephants have often been shown fighting with each other in sculptures. At Kailasa temple, no.16 at Ellora, the best example of this kind can be seen, where they are portrayed expressively in "life size" on the *gajathara*, the layer of the plinth depicting elephants. Numerous depictions of this motif at Ellora have different bearings of these two mighty animals. Among

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these motifs sometimes even composite lions are also portrayed. These are fantastic monsters called *śardulas* having pointed ears, decorative curls on their necks. The whole depiction covers three main sides of the plinth. Mainly the horizontal depictions of lions and elephants are shown engaged in fighting. But among these some elephants are shown standing in a row without fight. These standing elephants are portrayed holding in their trunks lotuses and bunches of lotus-stalks with buds. In the recess, in the middle of each elephant, *nāgas* in human forms, and *dampatis* or *yakcis*, *yakcas* are placed. Lions are absent in this row of elephants. But we see the lion-elephant fight again in the corner of the plinth. Interestingly, the last panel, i.e. front half to the right side of the plinth, on *pradakṣiGāpatha* (circumambulation path of the temple), depicts the final scene of the battle. Here one lion is shown standing with all emotions of its victory over the mighty elephant. Finally the elephant collapses on the ground and the war comes to an end. The *pradaksināpatha* of the temple also ends here. The lion and elephant motif at Kailasa temple is unique and narrates a story of the battle between lions and elephants ending with the killing of elephants. The sculptural depiction is also one of the best examples of elegance and fine workmanship of the poetic theme in the stone. (Pl. I. a,b,c,d,e,f)

One of the early representations of the lion-elephant motif is attributed to the Gupta period. It is a large metal column having ornate capital with lotus and lion on elephant images, unearthed from Nalanda.¹ The column capital has an elephant standing on a full bloomed lotus; whereas the lion is shown seated on its back. It is interesting to note that on the head of the lion, the post with two parasols the *chatrāvali* is shown.² However, the motif does not represent any war between the two. It portrays the royalty and prosperity through the symbols such as lotus, elephant, lion and parasols.

The Gaja-Simha motif is so common and is portrayed in varied stylised forms. It is interesting to note that instead of an actual lion, the motif is also portrayed through the composite and fantastic forms of lion i.e. *śardula* fighting with elephant. The fantastic lion forms are seen among these said lion on elephant sculptures known as *vyāla*, *viāl* or *śardula*. They are always shown in masculine, vigilant, malevolent, terrifying and soaring positions and are sometimes also depicted as playful and aggressive. They are shown engaged in fighting with human warriors as well. Sometimes they are shown similar to those lions on elephant motifs. They are decorated on the walls, in the recesses and represented in standing postures. According to scholars, these are composite animals called *vyāla*; and are in range of variety.³ *Viāla* is another synonym for *vyāla*, probably derived from Sanskrit word whereas, *śardula* is the heraldic type.⁴

Gaja-Simha in the literature

In classical Sanskrit poetry composed by Kālidāsa, Banabhamma and others, we come across frequent references to the battle between lions and elephants in a poetic manner. Often in such poetic descriptions, we read that the battle ends with seizing the pearls in the globes of elephants by lions. Several synonyms for elephant-pearls such as *gajamauktika*, *kunjaramani*, *ibhakumbhamuktāphala*, *karikumbhamuktāphala* and *gajakumbhamuktāphala* etc. are attested

¹. Cf. Gangoly 1955: 3–4.

². Cf. Gangoly 1955: pl.II.

³. For details cf. Dhaky 1965.

⁴. Cf. Gangoly 1955: 2–3.

in ancient Sanskrit literature. With this background, we proceed to the literary sources to understand the poetic form of lions, elephants and elephant-pearls to postulate the idea behind the sculptural formation of Gaja-Simha as a motif.



fig.1 . a,b,c,d,e,f. Kailasa temple, no. 16 at Ellora

In the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa,⁵ there is a description of Dasaratha killing lions. The lions are such that they have teared open the globes of elephants and the pearls from those temples are stuck in their pointed claws. Similarly, in the *Kumārasambhava*,⁶ Kālidāsa beautifully narrates the clash of

⁵ *tān hatvā gajakulabaddhatīvravairān kākutsthah kumilanakhāgralagnamuktān | ātmānan ranaktakarmanām gajānām ānyaA gatam iva mārganair amamsta || Raghuvamśa 9.65.*

⁶ *padam tuārasrutidhautarakam yasminn adrcmvāpi hatadvipānām | vidanti mārgam nakharandhramuktair muktāphalaih kesarinām kirātāh || Kumārasambhava 1.6.*

both the animals in the Himalayas. He describes that the lions swatted on the heads of elephants and have left after killing them. Their foot-prints and victim elephants' blood has been washed away due to the snow. But the hunters can still spot their path following the signs of fallen pearls from their paws. Banabhatòtòa narrates several instances describing lion-elephant hostility in his famous work Kādambari. It is exciting to read how Banabhatòtòa poetically expresses the accounts of lion-elephant hostility and seizing the elephant-pearls in different manners. For instance, the zeal of cracking of pomegranate is compared with tearing of the frontal globes of elephants by the lions due to which the pearls dropping out from their temples have reddish tint.⁷ At another place, while describing the forest-areas of the Madhyadeśa, Bāna describes that in these forests the hunters desirous of elephant-pearls kill hundreds of lions to whose claws these pearls are stuck when they tear the temples of elephants.⁸ At one place, he describes the groan of elephants with their wounded heads and the track of lion's jagged with pieces of the elephant-pearls turned reddish with blood and scratched with their terrible claws.⁹ At another place, Bāna describes elephant-pearls filled with blood look like red Gunja seeds.¹⁰ There is one more instance where Bāna uses the metaphor of lion, elephants and elephant-pearls for the moon, darkness of night and moon-light. He imagines that the moon-light is a powder of elephant-pearls released by the killing of darkness-elephant by the moon-lion. He also describes hundreds of lions eager to seize the pearls of the elephants from their heads.¹¹ Śīsupālavadhā, a well-known Sanskrit poem composed by the poet Māgha describes a den of lions filled with heap of pearls fallen from their paws. All these pearls are seized by the lions from the temples of wild elephants.¹² Further, Māgha beautifully narrates bathing elephants in water pool. He describes that when elephants sportively sprinkle water through their tips of trunks by the force of their breath, these droplets are created. The sprinkled precipitations surround their bodies. While, Māgha imagines that these showering tiny drops are similar to elephant-pearls located in their head globs.¹³

It seems that the great masters Kālidāsa, Bānabhamma and Māgha used the motif variously in their classical poetic compositions as a symbol to depict unbeatable victory and power.

The enmity and the war between lions and elephants have been mentioned in different Purānas and epigraphs. The Devīmahātmya of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna and the Devī Bhagvata Purāna elaborately narrate a story of the war with demons ending with the slaying of Mahicāsura, the demon king by the Goddess. This Devīmahātmya narrates a story of a fight between Devī and a Daitya Chāmara. During this fight, lion who is Devī's mount jumps over the forehead of elephant who is Chāmara's mount and also fought with the demon Chāmara.¹⁴ Further, it is described that Mahicāsura

⁷ *harinakharabhinnamattamātangakumbhamuktaraktārdramuktāphalatvi.mci khanitāni dāimabījāni*. Kale (1968: 35)

⁸ *nakhamukhalagnebhakumbhamuktāphalalubdhaih śabarasenāpatibhir abhianyāmānakesariśatā... vindhyā.tavii nāma*. Kale (1968: 370)

⁹ *eca nakhakomivilikhitavikamapatralekho rudhirapāmalah karimauktikadaladanturo mgapatimārgah*. Kale (1968: 53)

¹⁰ *antarāntarālagñāśyānaharinarudhirabindunā svedajalakanikācītena guñjāphalavimiśraih karikumbhamuktāphalair iva racitābharanena Vindhyaśilātālaviśālana vakcah sthalenodbhāsamānam...* Kale (1968: 56)

¹¹ Cf. Ridding, 1896: 15, 25, 26, 28, 123.

¹² *ucchidya vidvica iva prasrabhaA m[gendrān indrānujācarabhūtapatayo 'dhyavātsuh] vanyebhamastakanikhātānakhāgrayamuktamuktāphalaprakarabhāñji guhāgrhāni* || Śīsupālavadhā 5.12.

¹³ *ālolapuckaramukhollasitair abhīknam uksām babhūvur abhitovapurambucaraiḥ / svedāyata śvasitanirasta-vegāmugdhamūrdhanyaratnanikarair iva hāstikāni* || Śīsupālavadhā 5.30.

¹⁴ *tatah simhah samutpatya gajakumbhāntare sthitah bāhuyuddhena yuyudhe tenoccastridaśārīnā* || MārkaGeyapurāna 83.13.

assumes a shape of mighty elephant, i.e. Mahāgaja and attacks Devī and finally Devī cut off its trunk.¹⁵ While the Mahicāsura vadha story is narrated in a different manner in the Devībhagvatapurāṅga. Here, it is narrated that when during this terrible war, Mahicāsura began to assume many dreadful forms of animals and fantastic creatures. Among these he assumed a horrid form of Mahāgaja; the mighty elephant. The demon elephant uprooted the huge mountain through its trunk and threw it on Devī. Durgā, charged her bow and splintered the mountain into many pieces; interestingly, it is mentioned that, Devī's vehicle lion sprang on the elephant's head and started biting its temples with its sharp nailed claws.¹⁶ Thus, both the texts describe lion-elephant enmity and particularly attack on the temples of elephants.

However, though in the Purānic records the story of Goddess's lion jumping on the temples of the Elephant-demon and the Goddess herself killing the Elephant-demon is narrated, there is no description of obtaining any pearls from his temples. But some Eulogical verses of epigraphs utilize the same Purāṅgic records and further elaborate the idea of releasing of pearls. In inscriptions, Devī is praised as the destroyer of Mahicāsura in his Mahāgaja form and pearls are released from his globes. A number of poetic epigraphic verses of 'Praśasti', composed by subsequent poets very often describe the lion-elephant rivalry and obtaining the mythical pearls. 'Dewal Praśasti of Lalla the Chhinda', an inscription of 10th century CE. opens with poetic adoration dedicated to the Śhiva and Pārvati-Girijā. The verses remark the spotless beauty of Devī who gained fallen pearls from the globes of Mahāgaja, the Mahicāsura.¹⁷ 'Dewal Praśasti, without mentioning the whole Purāṅgic story reminds us of the war of lion and Mahāgaja and further elaborates it with releasing of lustrous pearls from the mighty elephant's globes.

Another stone inscription in the Nagpur Museum, narrates the deeds of the Mālava rulers. It is a Praśasti of Paramāra rulers Vairisi Aha to Lakmadeva. The inscription belongs to the early 12th century CE. The poet of the Praśasti beautifully composes the symbolic cantos for king Siyaka to narrate his great qualities of royalty and power gained by his ultimate deeds with the help of lion-elephant motif and mythical lustrous pearls dropping from the temples of elephants. To praise Siyaka the poet states that, the king's sword cleft the frontal globes of furious elephants, caused constantly releasing of clusters of big pearls like sparkling stars, which flew up into the air and falling down continuously on the earth.¹⁸ While, an inscription at Bāṭagāmī near Dharwad of 1035 CE. mentions the donee Rudra Śhiva as a young lion tearing the heads of elephants with his claws, who are his hostile disputants.¹⁹

¹⁵. *tam khagacarmanā sārddham tatah so 'bhūmahāgajah|| karena ca mahāsimham taA cakarca jagarja ca | karcatastu karaA devī khagena nirakrntata || Mārkaneyapurāna 83.31-32.*

¹⁶. Sharma (1962.374)

¹⁷. *śūlakcatadviradādānavakumbhamuktamuktākālāpakalitāmalkanmhakāntih... girijā* Epigraphia Indica Vol. 1, p. 77, verse 2, translation p. 81.

¹⁸. *anugaganam udasthah sthūlamuktossayā ye yadasidalitakupyatkumbhikumbhasthalebhyah| satatam api patantas tedyā yāvan na prthvīm prthulataralatāravajābhājo bhajante ||* Epigraphia Indica Vol. 2, p. 184, line 13 (verse 21), translated on p. 191.

¹⁹. *vādirudram vādībhamastakanakhāsphāmanakīśorakesarī.* Epigraphia Indica Vol. 5, p. 227.

Gajamauktika, the elephant-pearls

We find direct references to elephant-pearls in the Sanskrit literature mostly without mentioning lion-elephant battles. Most of these references are related to medicine and jewellery. Gajamuktā also appears as a name of women divinities, perhaps to highlight their fairness. Bhāravī beautifully visualised the handsomeness of Śiva as Kirāta in his famous composition Kirātārūniya. He says that the great hunter Kirāta who is Śiva, looks so lovely as Kirātasenāpati, when He adorns the strings of *gajamauktika*, elephant-pearls on his chest.²⁰ In his Mayūrasamaka, poet Mayūra compares beauty of a woman with the pearl fallen from the temples of rutting lord of elephants.²¹ The Vikramānkadevacarita based on the life of king Vikramāditya Tribhuvanamalla composed by Vidyāpati Bilhana describes that due to the terror of this king the opponent army became pale like *gajamauktika*.²² There are several references to the pearls from the globes of elephants in the Harśacarita of Bānabhamma also.²³

We find references to the necklace made of *gajamauktika*. Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadeva, a compilation of different stories contains a story of Jīmutavāhana's adventure when he is reborn as Vasudatta (4.2). The story speaks about his friend Pulindaka who wanted to gift a precious necklace to his friend. This necklace is made of pearls for which he goes to Himalayas to kill the elephants.²⁴ Therefore, he went to the forest to hunt wild elephants to fetch pearls from their heads.²⁵ Another reference from the Sanskrit drama Kaumudimahotsava written by the authoress Vijjikā, Vijjā or Vidyā and this mentions a wonderful necklace made of elephant-pearls. In the drama, it is said that the necklace is inherited from the time of Mahabharata war.²⁶ In Śārngadharapaddhati verse 529, we read that a Śabara women's daughter-in-law was wearing very cheap ornament made of *Gunja* seeds, whereas her husband i.e. Śabara women's son was highly capable to get her precious ornaments made from *gajamuktā*, but unfortunately he was ill and was weak.²⁷

One of the early reference of elephant-pearls, is probably from Kautōilya 2.11.4. He has mentioned three varieties of pearls, namely *sukti* (oyster shells), *sankha* (conch shell) and *prakirṅka*. According to Srivastava (1968: 284) perhaps this third miscellaneous category may include pearls born from an elephant known as *gajamuktā*. The early poem Gāthāsaptaśatī also refers to *gajamuktā* among different jewels and the jewellery.²⁸

Medicinal texts like Carakasamhitā and veterinary text like Hastāyurveda also mention elephant-pearls. Carakasamhitā in its Cikitsāsthāna section lists a number of gemstones such as *vajra* or diamond, *marakata* or emerald, *sarpamani* which is a mythical gemstone associated with serpents etc., and the *gajamuktā* pearls. According to the text, these precious stones are considered a remedy

²⁰ *lasadgajamauktikāvaligunena vakcasā-* Kīrātārjunīya 12.40. Cf. Regmi (2007: 263).

²¹ Cf. Quackenbos (1911: 349)

²² *ranaśimani tena vāirinaḥ ... gajamauktikarenupānurāḥ samanīyanta tapasvītām* | Vikramānkadevacarita 15.69.

²³ Cf. Cowell and Thomas (1897: 215).

²⁴ *tataśātīśayam prāptum muktāsāram sa matkrte* | *dhanurdvītyah prayayau gajān hantum himācalam* || Kathāsaritsāgara 4.2.76.

²⁵ Cf. Tawney (1924: 142).

²⁶ *hārah kumbhasamudbhavair viracitas tārāganaspardhibhiḥ* | ... *muktāphalaih*.... Kaumudīmahotsava 5.19.

²⁷ Cf. Peterson (1987: 78).

²⁸ For instance, cf. Gāthāsaptaśatī 2.73.

on poison.²⁹ Hastāyurveda 4.6–7 listed *gajamuktā* among gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, iron, pearls and coral which could be used for carving.³⁰

There are some references to ornaments made of *gajamuktā*, especially a nose-ring in the Purānic literature. In the Brahmahavaivartapurāna, 4.38.48 and 4.124.89, where we read about the nose-ring of goddess Durgā made from *gajamuktā* as *gajamuktāsamāyuktam sucārunāsikottamam and sunāsām gajamuktārham* respectively. Here it is significant to mention the idea of fallen pearls from the temple of demon elephant Mahicāsura cited in the epigraph as mentioned earlier. Whereas in the KricGajanmakhana of the same Purāna, we read *gajamuktā* rings worn by the Goddess and other divinities like Rādhā and Gopis.³¹ A verse from the K[idākhana of the Ganeśapurāna compares the shining white beauty of houses located in the heavenly Ganeśaloka with *gajamuktā*.³² While, Bhavicyapurāna 17.4 tells a story of Agni’s daughter named Gajamuktā. Nāradapañcarātra 5.5.105 states *gajamuktā* as one of the thousand names of Rādhā.³³ However, none of these texts clearly mention that the origin of these *gajamuktā* pearls is from the temples of elephants.

The Brhatsamhitā in its separate chapter entitled Mukṭālakṣana elaborately discusses eight different types of pearls, their sources and their auspicious and inauspicious signs. According to this text the eight sources of pearls are elephants, snakes, pearl oysters, conch shells, clouds, bamboo, whales and hogs.³⁴ The elephant-pearls could be obtained only from a special kind of elephant i.e. Airāvata. They are located in the foreheads of Airāvata family only. It is said that such pearls are created in the temples of those Airāvatas alone who are born under certain astronomical conditions. These pearls are large, varied in shapes, lustrous and should not be perforated. They are extremely valuable. When kings wear these pearls they become highly sanctified, victorious, bestowed with children and good health.³⁵ It is fascinating to note that in this list of eight pearls, we read one category born in rain-clouds of the seventh layer with wind in the sky. These pearls fall from the sky in the form of hailstones with the brilliance of lightening and are taken away by the heavenly beings.³⁶

Elephant-pearls is not only the subject of ancient classical literature but it could be met with in the Indian folklore also. It appears that, the belief of existence of elephant-pearls was subsequently continued in the later literature of mediaeval to the 18th century. The well-known saint-poet Gosvāmi Tulasidāsa, in his Śrīrāmacaritamānasa describes Lord Rāma’s necklace decked with elephant-pearls.³⁷ Hindi poetry Jñana-Svarodaya of Dariyā Sāhab mentions *gajamuktā* in the heads of elephants.³⁸

²⁹ Cf. Carakasamhitā Cikitsāsthāna 23.253.

³⁰ *lekhanāyopayujyante pradhānam tatra vakcyate ... gajamuktās ca śengajāh ...*

³¹ Cf. for example chapters 3.13, 5.61, 38.41 and 124.81.

³² *asankhyātā grhā santi bhāsvrā gajamauktikāh* | Ganeśapurāna 50.50.

³³ Cf. Swami Vijnanananand (2008: 237, 5.105)

³⁴ *Dvipabhujagaśuktiśankhābhraavenutimisūkaraprasūtāni | muktāphalāni tecām bahusādhu ca śuktijaA bhavati || simhalakapāralaukikasaurācmrakatāmraparnipāraśavāh|| kauberapānyavāmakahaimā ity ākarās tv acmau || Brhatsamhitā 81.1–2.*

³⁵ *airāvatakulajānām pucyaśravanendusūryadivasecu | ye cottarāyanabhavā grahane 'rkendvoś ca bhadrebhāh || tecām kila jāyante muktāh kumbhecu saradakośecu | bahavo brhatpramānā bahusaAsthānāh prabhāyuktāh || naicām argghah kārya na ca vedho 'tīva te prabhāyuktāh | sutavijayārogyakarā mahāpavitṛā dhrtā rājnām || Brhatsamhitā 81.20–22.*

³⁶ *varcopalavajjātam vāyuskandhāc ca saptamād bhraacmam | hriyate kila khād divyais taitprabhavam meghasambhūtam || Brhatsamhitā 81.24.*

³⁷ Cf. Rasad (1990: 66).

³⁸ Cf. Sastri (1941: 78).

We may see the underlying existence of elephant-pearls in certain practices. It is believed that a special kind of pearl i.e. *kunjaramani* or *gajamuktā* is located in the foreheads of elephants. While, it is also believed by some people that the offerings of clay-elephants to a certain deity bestow wealth and happiness to the offerer.³⁹

Gaja-Simha and Gajamuktā: The Metaphor

All these overwhelming literary data gives a very fair description of elephant-lion relation, mostly in poetic form. While narrating the fight between the two, most of the poets and authors have stated that the lions would tear the heads of elephants and seize the pearls through their sharp claws. These are the special pearls existing only in the elephant's heads. It is noteworthy to mention that the elephant-pearls are variously known as *ibhakumbhamuktāphala*, *karikumbhamuktāphala* or *gajakumbhamuktāphala* in literature. All these synonyms denote the source of pearls associated with the *kumbha* i.e. pot. Here, the heads of the elephants visualised as huge pots suggest specific symbolic affiliation with water leaden jars, *purna kumbhas* or the source of water and the birth-place of pearls in the water, similar to other pearls originating from the ocean. While tracing the symbolism of these two animals – lions and elephants – it seems that both the animals are linked to rain, thunder, water, vegetation, prosperity, power etc. in the Vedic, Epic and Classical literature. The Mahābhārata marks a series of elephant-symbolism associated with the clouds, rain, thunder, rivers, water, oceans and finally its manifestation in the form of Laksmī, the goddess of prosperity, in various ways. To note a few instances, the Bhīmaparvan of the Mahābhārata, remarks that the ichor flowing from the temples of elephant looks like seven streams of water from a mountain. (6.91.32).⁴⁰ While describing the city of Pātāla, it is said in the Udyogaparvan of Mahabharata that Airāvata takes water from this city and for the benefit of the world, he keeps that cold water into the clouds, which is then showered by Indra.⁴¹ One can trace somewhat similar poetic expression in the Haracarita where the kings are compared with the *diggajas*, the elephants of directions. It is said here that these *diggajas* are born from Lord Brahman's hands that drink the oceans. They are like rainy season clouds bestowing the fruits of desire.⁴² Whereas Anuśasanaparvan of the Mahābhārata refers to the abodes of Laksmī, the goddess of prosperity, which include the rain bearing clouds, elephants and asterisms. The Anuśasanaparvan further mentions the residence of the goddess of prosperity with those rivers, which are full of water, and interestingly those rivers have the neighborhood of the lions and elephants.⁴³

³⁹ Cf. Patel (1963: 67) for more details.

⁴⁰ *kuñjarena prabhinnena saptadhā dhāvato madam | parvatena yatha toyam sravamānena sarvatah || Mahābhārata 6.91.32 and 6. 91.33*

⁴¹ *airāvato smāt salilam grhātva jagato hitahò | meghecv amuncate útaA yan mahendrah pravarcati || Mahābhārata 5.97.7.*

⁴² *dharanidhāranakamā diggajā iva brahmakarāt, udadhīn pātum udyatā jaladharā iva ghanāgamāt, icchāphaladāyinaḥ kalpatarava iva nandanāt, sarvabhavāśrayā viśvarūpaprakārā iva śrīdharād ajāyanta rājānah.* Cf. Cowell and Thomas (1897: 101). Here, it might also be significant to refer an elephant's ornament known as *nakcatramālā*, described by Bānabhamma in his Haracarita. *naksatramālāmanitamukhīm karinnīm.* Cf. Cowell and Thomas (1897: 127).

⁴³ *vasāmi ... meghecu ca vrcimatsu | ... nakcatravithīcu ca úradīcu ... nadīsòu ... vasāmi nityam subahūdakāsu simhair gajaisicākulitodakasu | matte gaje.* Mahābhārata 13.11.14–16.

Further, Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata narrates the story of Laksmī approaching heaven after abandoning demon Bali's abode. Here are narrated several good omens once she stabilizes herself in the heaven and one of them which is important in the present context is that Indra bestows rain on the earth accordingly to the seasons and makes earth with full of oceans.⁴⁴ Thus, it is important to note here the association of Laksmī and Indra with the phenomenon of rain. Further, Indra is the one who is mounted on the Airāvata. Interestingly, one of the synonyms of elephant is *madāmbara* (lust-garment), which is a garment of Indra.⁴⁵

The celestial elephant is called Airāvata. *Irāvata* is the one who possesses *irā*, a fluid and Airāvata is the one born in that family. Another word for Airāvata is *abhra-mātanga* which also means an elephant of the cloud.⁴⁶ Airāvata also means a kind of rainbow and is again associated with the phenomenon of rain. According to a myth from Mātangalīlā; the celestial Airāvata was born from the two halves of the egg-shell broken by the Garuda. According to the myth, Brahman, the creator took these two halves and created the divine elephant known as Airāvata from them through his virtue. Later on Airāvata became a mount of god Indra, who bestows rain on the earth. Another version of the birth story of the Airāvata is attributed to the great event of Samudramanthana, churning of ocean. It is said that Airāvata emerged from the churning of the milky ocean with his consort Abhramu. The word Abhramu may be connected to monsoon clouds.⁴⁷

Airāvata, the celestial elephant is considered to be the originator of all earthly elephants, an animal-archetype of rain bringing monsoon clouds and a benefactor to vegetation. It has the power to attract rain clouds. It bestows children, boons of earthly happiness, prosperity, profuse crops, cattle, offspring, health and long life.⁴⁸ We read about an elephant that is similar to Airāvata in one of the Buddhist Jātaka stories of Vesantara. There is a white elephant in this story, which is owned by king Vesantara. This auspicious elephant brings rains and bestows prosperity and fertility to the country. King Vesantara gives away this precious white elephant to his neighbouring country suffering from famine and brings rains and prosperity to that miserable country.⁴⁹

In the literature lion symbolises power, chivalry, swiftness and royalty or kingship. The lion also denotes beauty, benevolence or even affection. Mostly lions are believed to be living in the southern, Vindhya and Himalayan regions.⁵⁰ Remarkably in the Vedic literature, lion represents Indra's weapon, the thunder. Maruts accompany Indra in his warfare. The roars of Maruts are many times compared with lion's roars. They possess thunder as their weapons. Similarly, the Vedic deity Parjanya

⁴⁴ .yathartu sasyesu vavarsōa vāsavo na dharmamārgād vicācāla kais cana | anekaratnākarabhūṣaṇā ca bhūh
sughosaghosā bhuvanaukasām jaye || Mahābhārata 12.221.90.

⁴⁵ Cf. Gupta (1983: 3) for details.

⁴⁶ Cf. Dowson (1888: 180)

⁴⁷ Cf. Simmer (1989: 53,104,105,106).

⁴⁸ For details cf. Zimmer (1989: 53, 59, 60, 104, 105, 106)

⁴⁹ Cf. Simmer (1986: 107) and Gupta (1983: 23–24) for more details.

⁵⁰ Cf. Krishna Kumar (1986: 83–88).

is nothing but a rain cloud that sheds water on the earth. He roars like a lion and can be heard from afar with thunders.⁵¹ The lion signifies the thundering in early literature. The lion causes to generate rain in the sky, denotes power, royalty, wealth and benevolence. All these literary references suggest that the elephant and the lion are associated with rain bearing clouds, rain and prosperity. As described in the literature *gajamuktā* is a lustrous, brilliant, white pearl; uneven in shape and without perforation. The pearl is always located in the frontal globes of special kind of elephants i.e. of Airāvata family as we know from the B[hatsaAhitā. It is believed that these pearls have certain magical properties. They are considered highly sanctified; bestow victory, prosperity, children and good health.

According to zoology elephant-pearls, *gajamuktās* do not exist in reality. They are imaginary or fanciful.⁵² Nevertheless, some people believe that they are formed by the encrusted rut of the elephants, which is later scratched off and is made into bead-like granules that serve as pearls; or probably it is a knot formed into their tusk.⁵³

However, when we develop the metaphor of lion-elephant to the thundering and rain-clouds, we may associate these elephant-pearls with raindrops and especially with the hailstone showers. The roaring thunder in the form of a lion attacks the clouds in the form of elephants causing to release rain and showers of hailstones, poetically imagined as *gajamuktās*, the uneven, unperforated, lustrous elephant-pearls. Here it is important to note that BhatsaAhitā specifically listed the hailstones as heavenly pearls generated in the clouds.

Gaja-Simha sculptures

Lion and elephant motif or Gaja-Simha representations in plastic art as decorative sculptures also express the same idea of natural phenomenon of rain. The fight of both animals suggests the movement of heavy rain clouds similar to elephants in the sky. The roars of lightening thunder is symbolised as aggressive lions attacking on clouds resulting in hailstones' showers of the lustrous pearls, *gajamauktikas* falling on the earth. This marvel of rain-cycle of clouds, thunder with hailstones probably turned into the mythical story and formed into the lion-elephant motif with *gajamauktika* pearls. Further, *gajamauktikas* became celestial and magical ornaments. As they are believed to be the heavenly ornaments representing the divine sanctity, purity, fertility, longevity, royalty, power, victory and treasure, hereafter adorned by the divine beings. The ornaments like nose-ring or string made of these magical pearls are commonly attributed as an important ornament to the Śaivaite, Vaicnavaite, Śakta, Gānapatya and others sects. Later, the *gajamauktikas* or *gajamuktās* became as a special but mythical ornament to be worn by kings.

The sculptural embellishments

It is significant to point out a few early depictions of Abhiceka Laksmī or Gaja Laksmī images showing lions along with the elephants,⁵⁴ perhaps to imply the metaphor of rain. The same

⁵¹. Cf. Macdonell (1897: 58, 79, 84).

⁵². Cf. Bedi (1969: 44) and Sures Chandra Banerji (1994: 169).

⁵³. Cf. Bedi (1969: 44).

metaphor can be probably applicable to the Gupta period sculptural head fragment of lion showing dispensing pearls pendants from its mouth.⁵⁵ Possibly, a similar idea echoed on decorative Kirtimukha motif. The Kirtimukhas, in most of the instances are depicted releasing pearl-strings and decorative floral forms of flora and fauna from their mouths. Probably, both these cases are decorative but graphic representation of the same metaphor.



fig. 2 Kirtimukha (Khidrapur, Maharashtra)

Coming back to Gaja-Simha column, belonging to the Gupta period described earlier, beautifully portrays the standing elephant surmounted by the seated lion. Above it we see the parasols. The sculptural column compositely indicates the standing celestial white elephant to suggest rain bearing cloud representing the prosperity. The seated lion and the parasols post over its head symbolise the roaring and blazing thunder but with vital power and great virtue represent the governing royalty. Strikingly the whole depiction does not depict any war between lion and elephant. We feel that it indicates the gentle and benevolent supremacy. The sculpture personifies the king who protects his subjects from droughts, bestows prosperity, endurance and sanctity.

Whereas, the life-size Gaja-Simhas on the plinth of Kailāsa temple at Ellora of Rashtrakuta period exhibit the mount Kailāsa raising up through the rain bearing moving clouds with the roaring furious brilliant thunder. Kālidāsa poetically described the clouds floating around the mount Kailāsa; and immediately after this description he narrates seized elephant-pearls by lions in his KumārasaAbhava.⁵⁶ Similar poetic description of the pinnacle of mount Kailāsa and licking the clouds can be read in the inscription of a temple built by Rājasimheśvara Pallava. The inscription also describes the king Rājasimheśvara as a royal lion who hosts the enemies in the shape of haughty elephant. Interestingly one of the inscriptions of Śrī Kalina Rājā who is believed to patronise the creation of Kailasa temple at Ellora; mentions the similar idea of the mount Kailāsa clad in the clouds.⁵⁷

However, at some places elephants are depicted as arrogant enemies in the literature and in the inscriptions and the victorious kings are depicted as lions. Here the metaphor of elephants is the

⁵⁴. Cf. Joshi N.P. (2013: 258,302) and B.R. Mani 2012. Also cf. pl. no. 127.

⁵⁵. Cf. Agrawala (1950: 115).

⁵⁶. *āmekhalam samcaratām ghanānām cchāyām adhahānugatām nicevya | udvejitā vrcmibhir āśrayante śengāni yasyātapavanti siddhāh|| padam tusārasrutidhautarakam yasminn adrcmvāpi hatadvipānām | vidanti mārgam nakharandhramuktair muktāphalaih kesarinām kirātāh.* KumārasaAbhava 1.5–6.

⁵⁷. Cf. Sivaramamurti C. (1970: 7).

same and represents prosperity but only under the possession of enemies. The winner or victorious kings are then represented as lions and as a symbol of supreme royalty who acquired the prosperity, i.e. elephants, by conquering them in battle.

Finally, the sculptor of Kailasa at Ellora very lyrically portrays the high pinnacle of great mountain Kailāsa, glancing through the clouds in the form of fighting lion-elephants, gaining the mythical pearls, *gajamauktikas* from their temples, the row of serenely standing elephants holding lotuses and creepers in their trunks to convey the rain and abundance of water or rivers. The whole depiction ultimately suggests the supremacy, victory and prosperity under the great monarchy of Rashtrakutas by using the metaphor of Gaja-Simha on the plinth of the mountain temple of Śiva as Kailasa at Ellora.

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