

**The antecedent's diverse influences on and by Vaishnava Art, as perceptible from the times of Copper Anthropomorphic Figures**

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INTRODUCTION

The 'Copper Hoards' with its restricted meaning has been known to the scholars since 1822. Amongst these copper objects the anthropomorphic figures have been a subject of debates and hypothesis with greater frequency especially in the last few decades. It was B.B.Lal<sup>1</sup> who for the first time suggested the possible association of Ochre Coloured Ware and the Copper Hoards. The mutual compatibility of the two namely Ochre Coloured Pottery assemblage and Copper Hoard artifacts as part and parcel of a common culture is only being grudgingly accepted over the years. The question of the utility of the anthropomorphic figures, however, remains afloat as there are nearly thirty contentions regarding the possible identity and or use of the object. Way back in 1987 Krishna Kumar<sup>2</sup> had first suggested that anthropomorphic figures represent Indra and published a

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<sup>1</sup> Lal, B.B.1951. Further Copper Hoards from the Gangetic Basin and a Review of the Problem. *Ancient India* 7: 25-38.

<sup>2</sup> Kumar, K.1995, Identification of the Rgvedic Images of Indra. *Annals of BORI* LXXV :223.

number of papers over the decades reiterating the same, stating that the copper anthropomorphic images are the images of Indra of the Late Rgvedic Aryans. But for some echoes of endorsements<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup> the assertions received scant support from scholars at large. Eyeing nothing less than the Harappan lineage for the Vedic Aryans, Kumar's scholarly plea fell on deaf ears. However, with the reporting of the presently unique composite anthropomorphic<sup>8</sup> figure from Haryana coherent affirmation for the anthropomorphic figures as Indra is clearly discernible, if later representations of Indra and Vishnu are compared with much earlier ones, including the anthropomorphic figures [ **FIGs - 1 & 2** ] . In this article a synthesis has been attempted after a brief enumeration of earlier literature on Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture, the Copper Hoards and none the least regarding

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<sup>3</sup> Mishra,P.K. 2000 Empirical Knowledge in the Indigenous Development of Copper Based Metallurgy during the Proto-Historic Period. In V.K. Thakur and K.K. Mandal (Eds) *Science, Technology and Medicine in Indian History*, Patna: Janaki Prakashan. pp. 7-12.

<sup>4</sup> Manjul, S., J. Manuel, Sangita Chakraborty, Milan K Chauley and Ashutosh Saxena 2011 Changing Facets of Indian Cultural Expression through Arts across the Ages, in Shared Heritage of Sculpture and Decorative Arts in the SAARC Region SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo pp 70-89

<sup>5</sup> Manuel, J **2004** Madarpur Discoveries: Resolution of Some Problems in Protohistory, Puratattva Vol. 34. Journal of the Indian Archaeological Society. Delhi 166-169

<sup>6</sup> Manuel, J **2009** Possible links in the hoary antecedents of Vaishnava Iconography Kala Vol.no. XIV. The Journal of Indian Art History Congress. Published by I.A.H.C. & Sharda Publishing House, New Delhi. pp.42-52

<sup>7</sup> Manuel, J **2011** Elements of iconography and inferred ethos as clues to identifying past communities: Some Examples Kosala-4 Journal of the Chattisgarh State Deptt. of Culture and Archaeology, Raipur pp 107-136 and 16

<sup>8</sup> Manjul, S.K. and Arvin Manjul 2007 Composite Anthropomorphic figure from Haryana: A solitary example of Copper Hoard. *Pragdhara* 17 : 17-26.

the anthropomorphic figures. Stringing together of earlier assertions of several scholars working in related fields leads one to interesting possibilities about the antecedents of Vaishnava iconography that enables it to have an antiquity of at least 4000 years. This include identification of the copper anthropomorphs as Indra and the profound influence of these figures on the genesis of Vishnu images. The domination and depiction of Indra earlier, and the depiction of Vishnu including his *avatars* through early art had great impact on depictions of non-Vaishnava deities, particularly with regard to the akimbo hands of the copper anthropomorphs. But depiction of some divinities remained un-affected which in no small reason was due to ethnic and ethical differences, at the root of portrayal of art. After discussing the root cause for the preference or the lack of it with regard to the overwhelming imagery of the copper anthropomorph and its impact over the centuries, the enumeration spells out the clearly discernible influences of the human shaped metal figures on other cults. The influences of art from non-Vaishnava ateliers especially in the early historic period, is also elaborated herein.

### **COPPER HOARDS AND OCHRE COLOURED POTTERY ASSEMBLAGES**

The sites yielding Copper Hoards are mainly concentrated in the Ganga- Yamuna doab region. But these are found in far off regions also, with retrieval of one or few of the typical objects identified with the culture. Generally, the assemblage of copper artifacts in what is defined as Copper Hoard Culture includes: flat celts, antennae swords, harpoons, lugged spearheads, rings, shouldered celts, flat celts, hatchets and anthropomorphic figures. Over the past and more so in recent decades there are several assertions regarding the authorship of the hoards,

including that they were vestiges of Aryan migration<sup>9</sup> in India pre- and non-Aryan people<sup>10</sup>, the ancestors of the present- day Mundas; Harappan refugees<sup>11</sup>, indigenous Late Rgvedic Aryans<sup>12</sup>. Significantly, Singh<sup>13</sup> (1995: XV and 158) while decrying the self convinced scholars that the ‘Indo – Aryans’ were not familiar with the potter’s wheel besides giving several words that hinted the possibility also mentioned *agnibhrajās* as ochre Colour in relation to the properties of the pottery, which suits the description of the Ochre Colour Pottery [OCP]. It is noteworthy to mention that of the total 45 antiquities obtained from the Copper Hoard and Ochre Colour Pottery site at Madarpur<sup>14</sup>, 37 objects were of stone of which ‘27 are broken fragments of stone pestles’. Evidently, the Soma extraction being done three times a day and that too when ‘the stones were pounded with a large sound to scare away the evil spirits’<sup>15</sup> many pestles were needed and many

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<sup>9</sup> Heine- Geldern, P. 1936. Archaeological Traces of the Vedic Aryans, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* IV: 87-115. As mentioned by Joshi M.P 1996 in *Puratattva* 26

<sup>10</sup> Lal, B.B.. 1951: op.cited 25-38

<sup>11</sup> Gupta, S.P. 1989. Copper Hoards, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol I. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. p.93.

<sup>12</sup> Kumar, K. 2002. The Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture and associated Copper Hoards: A fresh appraisal. in C. Margbandhu et. al. (Eds) *Puraratna: Emerging trends in Archaeology, Art, Anthropology, Conservation and History*. Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan, pp. 156,157 and Kumar, K. 2002a. The typology and Identification of Proto-historic Copper/Bronze Anthropomorphs: An Assessment in the light of New Evidence. *Pragdhara* 12: 130.

<sup>13</sup> Singh, B.1995.*The Vedic Harappans*, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, pp XV, 158.

<sup>14</sup> Sharma, D.V., A.Pradhan, V.N.Prabhakar, A.K.Bhargav and K.A. Kabui 2002. A Report on Excavation at Madarpur, A Copper Hoard Site. *Puratattva* 32: 40.

<sup>15</sup> Kochhar, R 2000, *The Vedic People*, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, pp 101,102.

more broken and therefore pieces would be found in greater numbers, from even small settlements. Often evidence of clods of burnt earth has been reported from such sites some of which could definitely have been the remains of 'fire altars'. The Copper Hoards have also been associated with the OCP Culture, but its area of spread is not limited to the region circumscribed by the general area associated with the pottery. According to Joshi<sup>16</sup> 'no doubt that they are associated with the authors of the OCP' but 'it is also true that there are many places, for example Kumaun and Nepal, where anthropomorphs are found but not the OCP.' Other spatial extremes, where anthropomorphs are found, but not the OCP, includes one possible head portion of the anthropomorphic figure from Lothal and the one male figure from Kolabarti, in Bihar.

More than six decades ago B B Lal<sup>17</sup> visited Bisauli, a site that yielded copper hoard objects including two different types of anthropomorphic figures and searching the context of the copper objects and reported the finding of 'ill fired, thick ochre washed ware' that claimed to be contemporary to the copper implements. He<sup>18</sup> hinted towards the possibility of the association of Ochre Colored Ware and Copper Hoards. He continued to assert the same in his several papers over the decades. Although not very eagerly, several scholars including:

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<sup>16</sup> Joshi, M.P.1996. The Anthropomorphs in the Copper Hoard Culture of the Ganga Valley *Puratattva* 26: 29.

<sup>17</sup> Lal B B 1951: op.cited pp.25-27

<sup>18</sup> Lal B.B.1951: ibid 38

Gupta<sup>19</sup>, Kumar<sup>20</sup>, Balasubramaniam<sup>21</sup> et.al, Laha<sup>22</sup>, Gaur<sup>23</sup>, Sharma<sup>24</sup>, Manjul<sup>25</sup> et. al. were convinced that these are part and parcel of one and the same culture. Herein, for the sake of brevity the composite culture with the ordinary use objects represented by OCP remains and the then much more precious metal objects known as Copper Hoards are together mentioned as Copper and Ochre Pottery (COP) Culture.

### **COP CULTURE AND THE COPPER ANTHROPOMORPHS**

Although, the number of known anthropomorphs are over hundred the count of the hypotheses proposed regarding their possible usage, standing over twenty five, is also not meager. About two decades back Kumar<sup>26</sup> has given all the then current views regarding the anthropomorphs, namely: 'a religious symbol or image, a missile or boomerang, an all purpose tool, a primitive object of magic or cult significance, a prototype of the *srivatsa*- symbol, a precursor of the ritualistic

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<sup>19</sup> Gupta1989: op cited, p.93

<sup>20</sup> Kumar K 1995: op cited p.223;

<sup>21</sup> Balasubramaniam, R, M.N. Mungole, V.N. Prabhakar, D.V. Sharma and D Banerjee 2002 Studies on Ancient Indian OCP Period Copper in Indian Journal of History of Sciences 37.1 p.1

<sup>22</sup> Laha, T., J Shankar, R. Balasubramaniam, A. Tewari, V.N. Prabhakar, D.V. Sharma, and D. Banerjee. 2002 Material and Electrochemical Characterization of Ancient Indian OCP Period Copper, in Indian Journal of History of Sciences 37.4 pp 321-325

<sup>23</sup> Gaur, R.C. 2004. Identification of the Indo- Aryans. In A.S.Gaur, Sila Tripathi, Sanjib Singh(Eds) *Krishnayan: A Peep into the Past*. New Delhi: Harman Publishing House. pp. 161,162,

<sup>24</sup> Sharma, D.V., K.C. Nauriyal and V.N.Prabhakar, 2006. Excavations at Sanauli 2005-2006: A Harappan Necropolis in the Upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab. *Purattatva* 36:166-179

<sup>25</sup> Manjul, S. et. al. op cited pp 70-89.

<sup>26</sup> Kumar 1995 : op.cited, pp. 224, 225

thunderbolt, a *vajra* used as a harpoon, an object of worship, a figure in shape of a man, a personified deity, some kind of ritual figure, a cult object associated with fertility and prosperity, a token of the Mother Goddess, an image of standing Siva, a kind of weapon or an object of ritualistic significance etc, and his own view that these are images of Indra.’ Over the intervening period some other interpretations of yet other scholars listed by Joshi<sup>27</sup> include: a symbol of fertility, prototype of Sani-devata, Vedic-*vajra* – a weapon which was fitted with a handle and thrown and *nandipada*. Joshi<sup>28</sup> opines that the anthropomorphs represent ‘a personified axe (parasu-purusha)’, what he terms alternatively as a ‘distinct parasu as a symbol of leadership. Vijaykumar<sup>29</sup> also has given a select list of the possible identity of anthropomorphs besides those already enumerated above, he quotes Sharma, who has asserted that they are symbol of good omen. According to Vijaykumar the anthropomorphs represents the Maruts. Wahal and Shukla<sup>30</sup> (2008:59-62) specifically identifies the anthropomorph with the right arm upraised discovered at Madarpur, as representing Natesa.’ Earlier, Balasubrahmaniam<sup>31</sup> et.al. opined that the right hand raised above is akin to

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<sup>27</sup> Joshi 1996: op.cited p. 26

<sup>28</sup> Joshi 1996: ibid pp. 27,29

<sup>29</sup> Vijaykumar, S. 2006.The Copper Hoard Culture of the Indo-Gangetic Plains- A Mystery Unravalled. *Puratattva* 36:112

<sup>30</sup> Wahal, L.M. and Shukla, K.S. 2008 An Unique Artifact of the Copper Hoard of the Ganga Valley: An Appraisal. B.R.Mani and Alok Tripathi (Eds) *Expression in Indian Art*. Delhi:Agam Kala Prakashan. 59-62.

<sup>31</sup> Balasubrahmaniam et.al. op.cited, 3

‘posture indicating abhaya mudra in which Hindu deities are generally depicted’. Pertinently, they also opined that in the anthropomorphs from Madarpur arsenic was not intentionally added unlike other copper objects of the hoard which are required to be tougher, as the anthropomorphs served as cult objects or images. It appears from the above that unlike earlier assertion which conceived the images as tools or weapons, now with enough of retrospection and the wide variety of shapes, weight range, presence or absence of features like: hammering marks, sharp edges, prominent ridge on the head with a nail head like section and sizes found, scholars are inching towards recognizing them as divine or semi-divine beings. Even in this category the list is long and includes: Mother Goddesses, Sani-Devata, personified axe (parsu), Vedic-*Vajra*, Siva/Natesa, Maruts and Indra.

### **COPPER ANTHROPOMORPHS AS INDRA**

Vedic scholars like S.V. Venkateshwara, E.W. Hopkins, A.C. Das, were the first to suggest the presence of primeval images who brought to fore several Rgvedic references wherein it was clear that image worship was in vogue even during the times of early Aryans<sup>32</sup>. Venkateshwara pointed to specific hymns, like: RV, IV. 24.10. ‘Who will buy this my Indra for ten cows’? When he has slain his foe he may give him back to me’; RV, VI. 28.6. making of ‘beautiful images’ from ugly mass; RV, IV.17.4. and ‘that manufacturing of images of Indra was a skilled

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<sup>32</sup> Kumar 1995: op.cited 226-229.



profession, which commanded high respect in Rgvedic society<sup>33</sup>. Evidently, even the few references suggesting the existence of Indra Images in Rgvedic times raises questions how he would have been depicted. Some clues towards his form are afforded by other Vedic hymns. Indra was the first and foremost god in the Rgvedic pantheon who protected his devotees from all possible dangers and miseries which is also understood by references to Indra's arms being used as protection against the spears of enemies (AV, VI. 99. 2 & 3)(**FIG-2**). The prominence given to the arms of Indra and the power of his arms, in Atharvavedic hymns are: AV, IXX.13.6.; IXX.15.4.; XX.7.2.and AV, XX.87.3., which tells volumes about the might of his arms that has, therefore translated as arms in akimbo disposition in the copper anthropomorphic figures. While other Gods are reputed to show their power by other means, Indra is often associated with the might of his arms, so much so that his arms are said to be as strong as *vajra* (AV, IXX.13.6.). None of the gods compares with the early supremacy of Indra and the emphasis on arms of the war leader of the Rgvedic Aryans. Not only the body language of the iconography of the anthropomorphs of the standard type, the anthropomorphic figures from Madarpur with one arm upraised, shows the victorious God and the might of his arm. Herein the God is depicted as the victor. Whereas, figures without legs or stump like legs were placed on pedestals or alternatively were probably carried around in procession on a pole as part of celebrations. Sethna<sup>34</sup> points out to definite clues of Indra festivals and quotes RV, I 10.1: wherein 'worshippers held thee aloft as it were (on) a pole.'

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<sup>33</sup>Kumar 1995: ibid

<sup>34</sup> Sethna, K.D. 1994. Harappan Culture is Vedic, *Manthan* XV no. 2-3: 158,159.

Venkateshwara's suggestion that there were permanent images of Indra, which were made and hired during Indra festivals Kumar<sup>35</sup> is of importance in this context. Other images were used in slaying the temporary images of demon Vrtra with the generally sharpened outer edges of the anthropomorphs being used for the latter purpose. According to Banerjea<sup>36</sup> that since in the hymn the plural word *vrtrani* is used, it 'figuratively refers to the enemies of the hirer, who were to be harmed or slain through the agency of the Indra fetishes' these were thus meant for *abhichara* purpose. There are many references<sup>37</sup> in Vedic, especially Brahmana, passages and a substantial portion of Atharvaveda is devoted to *abhichara*. Some later depiction of Gods - including Vishnu- as continuation of the earlier practices has also been associated with *abhichara* purposes<sup>38</sup>. Chaturvedi<sup>39</sup> tells of several texts like: Mahabharata Yajnavalkya-smriti, Brihatsamhita, which mention of ceremonies related to Indradhvaja. According to him it was made of a light material that could be carried conveniently and was sanctified by the attached emblem of the deity. He draws attention to RV, VII.85.2 : "while in the battle field where gods were invoked, soldiers were striving, fiery arrows were falling on the dhvaja." From the above it seems that the anthropomorphs could be discerned as being placed at least in four different

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<sup>35</sup> Kumar 1995: op cited 228

<sup>36</sup> Banerjea, J.N.1974. *The Development of Hindu Iconography* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. pp. 59,

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* pp.60, 399,404.

<sup>39</sup> Chaturvedi, S.N. 1997 Dhvaja Stambha. In K.K. Chakravarty and O.P. Mishra (Eds) *The Bounteous Tree: Treasures in Indian Art and Culture*. New Delhi: Sharda Publishing House. pp. 448, 449.

contexts, namely: in shrines and/or probably in each home<sup>40</sup>; during *abhicharika* rites<sup>41</sup> and as Indradhvaja<sup>42</sup>, during celebrations, as a sanctified emblem carried by the marching army (*Indradhvaja* in the battle field). The different type of usage at least explains, the more than few anthropomorphs found from such sites like: Madarpur, Bankot and Atwa. In the ancient scheme of things, the coppersmith cum salesman would be moving around the village crying aloud 'who will buy this my Indra for ten cows'? (RV, IV. 24.10) and would bury the unsold images as his prized possessions, to be dug out on festive occasions.

Whereas, Joshi<sup>43</sup> also comes close to the possible use of the figures and terms the anthropomorphs as representing 'some sort of structural formation,' as 'a symbol of leadership' '(be it political, economic or religious)'. But he relates the anthropomorphs with *Parasu-purusha* and expounds it further with the mythology of Parasurama -Dhanurdhara Rama besides the confrontation and ultimate reconciliation of two warring groups. However, in view of the significant number of Vedic references related to Indra bearing resemblance to the shape of the anthropomorph besides continuity- albeit with some changes- of traditions that spill over to the early historic period at the least, as would be enumerated below the best option of the identity of the anthropomorphic figures is Indra. The

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<sup>40</sup> Mishra 2000: op.cited 7-12

<sup>41</sup> Kumar K. 2007. Discovery of a New Copper Hoard Site at Village Atwa in District Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh) *Puramanthana* 4:1-7. & RV, IV. 24.10.

<sup>42</sup> Kumar, K. 2002a op.cited pp.129

<sup>43</sup> Joshi M.P. 1996:27-29

'confrontation and ultimate reconciliation of two warring groups' as proposed by Joshi has substance, albeit with the only difference that the same revolved around Indra rather than Parshuram. Vijaykumar<sup>44</sup> identifying the anthropomorphs with the Maruts, in a way, is very close to the identity of Indra considering at least the fact that the former are very much associated with Indra as friends and helpers as known from numerous Vedic references (RV, I. 102.7.; I. 166.1; III. 40. 3.; VIII.89.1; AV, III.1.6.; V.3.3.; XIII.1.3; IXX.18.8). However, in view of the several Vedic references, directly indicating to the images of Indra, the finding of more than one anthropomorphs from some sites does not necessarily mean that these are representative portions of the several combinations of numbers of the Maruts, known from ancient literary sources. The finding of anthropomorphs and the Copper Hoards in general as a treasure trove is due to the fact that as they were precious objects they were hidden as a cache by the artisans when it was not on hire or could not be sold. Many a times like in several other types of hoards, the owner could not retrieve the hidden material only to be discovered by others hundreds or thousands of years later. The four different reasons suggested for the usage of the images in relation to Indra, mentioned above, definitely show that these were much in demand in the Rgvedic community.

The copper anthropomorphic figures as Indra was a continuing prototype for the images of Indra in other mediums which can be traced in many sculptures of the early historic period. The characteristic depiction, namely the akimbo

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<sup>44</sup> Vijaykumar, 2006 op.cited.:112

posture has continued in the early depictions of Indra in stone as known from those seen in Mathura Museum<sup>45,46</sup> . Similarly, on the North Gate of Stupa no. 1 at Sanchi, Indra is shown holding the Vajra with both arms in akimbo, **[Fig- 3]** albeit in a cramped manner due to the dense depiction of persons in the imagery. While keeping with the times the Indra depiction were outnumbered by the Vishnu images and therefore one comes to note hundreds of figures of Vishnu with the akimbo posture as also at Udayagiri in Distt. Vidisha, (MP) According to Kumar<sup>47</sup> ‘with the rise of Visnuism and the consequent decline of the Indra-cult certain rites, originally associated with the Rgvedic Indra, viz. the Indra - Vrtra fight and Indra riding chariot, were adopted by the Visnuites’ and that there are several instances that ‘clearly demonstrate the gradual assimilation of the Rgvedic Indra-cult into the modern Vishnu cult’. However, the assimilation was not uniform everywhere throughout the subcontinent and relics of the past where Indra held dominance are yet to be seen in different regions where modifications have not totally obliterated the ancient traditions. Thus, in the modern times the ‘festival of Indra jatra, in the Kathmandu valley in Nepal statues of Indra are shown with ‘arms spread apart<sup>48</sup>, is one relic of the hoary past from the times of the copper anthropomorphs with its arms spread apart and curved in, influencing

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<sup>45</sup> Joshi, N.P. 2004 Mathura Sculpture, Sandeep Prakashan. New Delhi. pl. 59

<sup>46</sup> *Indian Archaeology 1981-82: A Review*: Pl XXXIV C & p.108.

<sup>47</sup> Kumar,K. 2000b The Protohistoric Copper / Bronze Anthropomorphs from northern India: Their Identification with Late Rgvedic Images of Indra. In Peeping Through the Past (Prof G.R. Sharma Memorial Volume) Eds S.C.Bhattacharya, et. al. University of Allahabad p. 109

<sup>48</sup> Pannier, F. 2001. On the God- Mask in the Dionysia and Indra jatra. *Marg* 52 no. 4: 70,71

art much later. Kumar<sup>49</sup>, tells of Indra-festival being 'celebrated at certain places in central Uttar Pradesh wherein an Indra-dhwaja bearing an effigy of Indra with outstretched arms on its top is worshipped first and then it is ceremoniously carried in procession to a public place, where it is buried under the ground and the event is immediately followed by the worship of Lord Krishna'. Obviously, the rise of Vaishnavism over Indra and usage of the earlier traditions in the successful transition is perceptible in such instances and indicates in no small measure the evolution of Vaisnava iconography taking its roots from the copper anthropomorphic figures.

## **RISE OF VISHNU AND VAISHNAVISM**

Allusions to Vishnu as nearly equal to Indra but not yet the supreme God has been noticed much early except for the Rgveda. Krishna <sup>50</sup> opines, 'according to Dandekar, it was a well known practice of the Vedic poets to connect any significant activity of any god with Indra who was the most prominent Vedic deity and, if religious dignity and recognition had to be specially granted to any particular god, the Vedic poets associated him with Indra and his war with Vritra. To give their god an official status, the followers of the Vishnu religion, says Dandekar, associated him with the official national god, Indra.' Definitely, the imagery of Indra as the copper anthropomorphs also was used profitably in the

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<sup>49</sup> Kumar 2000b op cited p.108

<sup>50</sup> Krishna, N. 1980 *The Art and Iconography of Vishnu- Narayana*, Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. pp. 23,

rise of Vishnu as the highest of Gods. Although one of the earliest reference regarding the rise of Vishnu to pre-eminence is in the Shatapatha Brahmana but Prajapati/Brahma and more conspicuously Indra held ground for long. Thus even in the Satapatha Brahmana besides the Taittiriya Samhita, it is Prajapati, who assumed the forms of Fish (*Matsya*), Tortoise (*Kurma*) and Boar (*Varaha*) on different occasions for the well-being of the created<sup>51</sup>. It is only later, 'some centuries before the beginning of the Christian era' that Brahmanical cults came to be centered round composite god Vishnu' that the three incarnations got associated with the latter. However, Indra continued to be eulogized in numerous hymns in the Atharvaveda while Vishnu is also given prominence in several hymns of the Veda but he has not yet carved out the pre-eminent position for himself until the Puranas got wider currency. Thus, in AV, VII. 26, 1& 5 Vishnu is lavishly praised but in the very next *mantra* he is depicted as worthy associate of Indra. There are *mantras* which show the coupled association of Indra and Vishnu, for instance AV, VII.44.1. Wherein both are mentioned as undefeatable. Thus, even though not above Indra during the Vedic period the deep association of both the Gods was utilized by the coppersmiths in portrayal of Vishnu also on the same lines.

However, not a single copper anthropomorph has been identified as Vishnu, except for the therio-anthromorphic figure identified as

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<sup>51</sup> Banerjea, 1974:op cited 389.

Varaha<sup>52</sup>, from Kheri- Gujjar in Haryana. But the Kheri Gujjar specimen cannot be the only image of the God and many would have been cast around this period. Pertinently, the anthropomorphs from Atwa **[Fig-1b]**, Distt. Moradabad, reported by Kumar<sup>53</sup> could also be related to Vishnu. This is tentatively surmised on the basis of exceptionally long legs of the six copper anthropomorph and may be alluding to the Vedic Vishnu who strode the world in three steps (RgVeda, I 22.17). Pertinently, Nanditha Krishna<sup>54</sup> writes ‘through Indra’s energy Vishnu takes his three strides, and then lauds Indra’ and that on ‘Indra’s call, Vishnu comes to the battle with his mighty strides to assist at the annihilation of Vritra’ definitely shows the might of his steps. Although the long legs of the six anthropomorphs recovered from Atwa may be portrayed in allusion to the mighty strides of the Vedic Vishnu, this view cannot be asserted more strongly than in the class, ‘may be possible’. Another difficulty lies in the fact that could these many images be actually portraying Vedic Vishnu? This question arises also due to the fact that Vishnu, in the Early Vedic times, was not equal to Indra. Perhaps if the Atwa figures are agreed upon as identifiable with Vishnu with the mighty stride, then these may on popularity criterion be dated nearer to the Puranic Vishnu of the *Vamana avatara* or may yet be of the Vedic times albeit much later when Vaishnavism was clearly moving towards forming a separate cult. The

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<sup>52</sup> Manjul and Arvin 2007 op.cited & Manjul, S.K. and Arvin Manjul 2012 Composite Copper anthropomorphs Figure from Haryana: A Re-appraisal. in Proceedings of Indian Art History Congress XX Session, 2011, Patna. Pp 14-19

<sup>53</sup> Kumar, K. 2008-2009. The Revised Typology and Identification of Proto-historic Copper/Bronze Anthropomorphs: Some Reflections on the iconography of two Unique Anthropomorphic Figurines from North India. Pragdhara 19: 180-181 and fig 1 f

<sup>54</sup> Krishna op cited pp. 23,24



earliest and presently undeniable evidence of such trend is definitely known by the unique composite anthropomorph found from the foundation of a house in village Kheri Gujjar, Haryana, has been identified as Varaha form of Vishnu by Manjul and Arvin<sup>55</sup>.

### **THERIO-ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURE AS VARAHA**

Considering the fact that there are many views associating the anthropomorphs with a spectrum of religious objects, like: *srivatsa*- symbol, ritualistic thunderbolt, a token of the Mother Goddess, standing Siva, Vedic Indra, *Sani-devata*, *Nandipada*, *parasu-purusha*, and Maruts, the assertion that the therio-anthropomorphic figure is *Varaha avatara* [Fig-4 ] has added to the number of hypotheses relating these objects to religious affinity. A glance back at the suggestion that the Atwa figures [Fig-1b] may as well be the Late Vedic Vishnu - if agreed- along with the composite figure from Kheri Gujjar as Varaha, then with the earlier figures of Indra gives strong evidence of the incipient Vaishnava iconography. Herein, the lineage of tradition is traced from the images of Indra that definitely includes the possibility of general images of Vishnu being made after some time during the diffusion of COP culture across time and space. The existence of many more images like those from Atwa pertaining to Vishnu coeval to or more likely few centuries before the image of Varaha was made, is a real possibility. However, one could hazard a guess that figures of avatars of Vishnu could perhaps only have been made at the earliest, during Mauryan times or in

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<sup>55</sup> Manjul and Arvin 2007:op cited, pp.18-20.

some pockets slightly earlier, considering the late emergence of the deity as discerned from literature and the fact that *avatars* of Vishnu in contradistinction to those earlier believed to be of Prajapati was coming into vogue about this time.

The antecedent of the Varaha image, however, goes back to the Rgvedic times. Although, not directly relatable, there are references in the Rgveda (RV, I.6.5; II.12.3; II.14.3) of cows being rescued by Indra, which however goes to show the type of religious imagery available. In fact, earlier boar form is associated with Emusa 'a fugitive designation of Vrtra' and Indra kills Emusa, while Vishnu carries it away on being asked by Indra<sup>56</sup>. Other early reference is to Prajapati who took the form of boar to save the earth. Thus, the figure in question if it is deemed to be of protohistoric period, then it should be of Prajapati. Then it also reinforces the contention by Manjul and Arvin that the letters on the image are proto historic Brahmi. On the other hand if the anthropomorph is held to be made around the Mauryan times then the image is of Vishnu as Varaha with the Brahmi on it being a variant of the Mauryan times. Pertinently, Jai Prakash, Dy. Superintending Epigraphist (Personal communication) on the basis of the script on the anthropomorph, has opined that 'all letters have great resemblance with those of Mauryan Brahmi except partial difference in the first letter of the first line and first letter of the third line.' The reason for the differences may be due to personal mannerism or regional variations. Alternatively, it could as well be due to the particular style of writing of the particular sect at the time and space

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<sup>56</sup> Nagar, S.L.1993 *Varaha in Indian Art, Culture and Literature*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International. pp. 4, 19,

settings and has not to be associated with an earlier Brahmi. In this context, the observation of Buhler<sup>57</sup>, that 'A variety of alphabets existed at the same time, the use of which probably varied according to the occupation and the education of the writers. Then, as was the case until lately, the learned Brahmans, the merchants who followed the orthodox faith, the Bauddhas, the Jainas and the professional writers (*karkuns*), had each their own peculiar alphabet or variety of letters, derived from the various schools (*lekhasala*) to which they went' is worthwhile to be noted. In the light of the above it is clear that minor variations in script may not be construed as a hallmark for declaring the legend on the anthropomorph to be prior to Mauryan Brahmi. Another indication towards the later times is the fact that there are several references in the Atharvaveda (AV, IV. 39.2; IX.7.25. XII.1.45) wherein, earth is mentioned or at least likened to a cow. Thus the background imagery of cows being saved by Indra is there, besides earth being alluded to cow was also in vogue. This late Vedic period was witnessing the rise of Vishnu and in this backdrop during the Mauryan period the artisans cast the figure of Varaha with cow depicted on the belly region of the deity taking the glorious heritage of the figures of Indra and thereby portrayed Vishnu at least as powerful, if not more.

If for a moment, the circumspection is kept aside one sees similarity in the depictions from the anthropomorphs associated with Indra to the stone images of Indra and Vishnu including incarnations of the latter through the presently unique

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<sup>57</sup> Buhler, G. 1882. Vallabhi Grants, *The Indian Antiquary* XI:. Reprinted in 1984, New Delhi: Swati Publications. p 305

composite anthropomorph. This right facing Varaha made of copper, has been replicated in the early Varaha in stone as at, Elal Village, District Ranga Reddy. This Ikshavaku Varaha<sup>58</sup> image from Elal Village is four handed with the face towards right. Another example of the right facing Varaha is seen in Mahabalipuram<sup>59</sup>. An image in the courtyard of National Museum also has a figure with Varaha facing right. Even in the later figures the tradition of Varaha with its face/body turn towards right, continued but these are most often found in far flung and remote regions, where change to the left facing Varaha did not come into vogue for many more centuries, rigidly continuing the earliest tradition as represented by the Kheri Gujjar Varaha. However, keeping with the demands of the clientele the artisans implemented many changes in the hub centers of Vaishnavism, albeit with continuity of the past also. In continuation of the Varaha anthropomorphic figure the Kushana stone image of Varaha **[Fig-5]** dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. AD, in Mathura Museum<sup>60</sup> although now shown facing left shows similar features namely the hands held apart and turning in while the legs like the anthropomorphs are placed apart from each other. There are significant departures from convention in the time gap of around 500 years between the two. Earth presented as cow placed on the abdomen of the composite anthropomorph, here, in turn is shown as a woman seated on the left shoulder of

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<sup>58</sup> Indian Archaeology 1986-87: A Review p 13

<sup>59</sup> Gopinath Rao T.A. 1993 Reprint Elements of Hindu Iconography Volume One, Part I Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi PLATE XXXVI.

<sup>60</sup> *Indian Archaeology* 1964-65 : A Review. p.82 and pl. LVII c.

the deity in depiction from Mathura. The hands are four in number and the two front ones touch the waist region, unlike the anthropomorphs, while the left leg is turned towards the left side. The Mathura figure is remarkable, as although it breaks free from the past conventions in some aspects it holds some relics of the past namely the arms are in the *katyavalambita* posture, besides the legs are portrayed apart. The legs in later Vishnu images were steadily coming closer and the akimbo posture was over the centuries becoming subdued. The artists associated with the cult of Vishnu however did not altogether leave the aura of power associated with the Indra images with its arms spread apart and turned in but without touching the abdomen region. There are many images of Vishnu in north India especially during the Gupta period wherein he is depicted with two front arms in the *katyavalambita* posture but without touching the waist or barely touching it. The front arms do not invariably touch the waist as the artisans devised methods to keep the palm portion away from the waist as a continuity of the anthropomorphs' impressive imagery by resting the weight of the arm by carving out the *shankha* in between or else leave a small portion un-carved between the waist and the palm area in a manner that would not be very visible to the worshippers. A late Gandhara figure of Vishnu discovered at Taxila and early Gupta sculpture of Surya from Mathura have the elbows as the farthest part of the body from the abdomen and their legs are placed apart from each other<sup>61</sup>. The depiction of Surya however differs somewhat in the fact that the two arms are drawn up towards the chest. Pertinently, continuity from the anthropomorphs in showing the legs of the deity spread apart was the first

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<sup>61</sup> Banerjea 1974: op. cit., p. 401, 435.

feature to be dropped, perhaps from about the early Gupta period, in some areas, at the least. Till the Gupta period, however, the arms shown spread apart and turned in either touching or even without touching the waist region continued. There are many examples of such depictions and needs not be elaborated here. However it would not be out of place to mention here that, although a larger number of the depictions of the Gupta period does not have the legs spread apart a figure identified as *abhicharikasthanakamurti* of Vishnu by Banerjea<sup>62</sup> due to its resemblance with textual description of the same in Vaikhanasagama and dated to circa 7<sup>th</sup> century CE has greater spread of the incurved front arms and has its feet also spread apart. This image even though of comparatively later period, carries greater influence of the copper anthropomorphs, largely retained as such due to the common thread line of the use of Indra images in the *abhichara* rituals as one of the functions that got transferred to Vishnu. Thus the bold connections made primarily by B.B.Lal, Krishna Kumar, Sanjay Manjul and Arvin Manjul besides few others, has, as far as the present author is concerned filled up the jigsaw puzzle of different artifacts (assemblages) in time and space to a large extent leading to the opening up of the antecedents of Vaishnava iconography that could now be traced back successfully to around 4000 years. However it is not that only Vaishnava iconography was influenced by the powerful imagery of the copper anthropomorphs, some others were also influenced but some deities and divine beings were not carved out keeping in mind the outline image of the powerful gods with akimbo arms and feet wide apart due to the particular background of the followers.

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<sup>62</sup> Banerjea ibid : 404

## THE ETHNIC AND ETHICAL DIFFERENCES

Before the advent of the COP Culture the sprawling Harappan Civilization was in existence with its in situ genesis from the pre- Harappan times, albeit with inputs from regional neighborhood. This civilization spread over 1.25 million sq km evidently had some periods of conflict between competing settlements or feuding clans, but there is a general lack of evidence for militarism<sup>63</sup>. According to Agrawal<sup>64</sup> the Harappans were largely egalitarian and quotes Renfrew that “the Harappan Civilization, does not reveal to the world any Ramses, any Hammurabi, nor yet any Gudea or Lagash”. In this context it is pertinent to note that not only ordinary male, female terracotta figures but even figures of male and female deities of the civilization, are shown at ease. The seated male deity figures with horns, on seals although has spread arms it rests on the bent knee in a yogic posture and is therefore symbolizing mental peace and concentration of mind. Several scholars do identify this figure and similar seal with earlier depiction of Siva. Pertinently, way back in 1931 Marshall <sup>65</sup> had mooted the idea that the several phallus like and near cylindrical objects are Siva-lingas, albeit not without much success. Now more than eighty years later these contentions particularly those related to Saivism in Harappan Civilization have found more concurrences

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<sup>63</sup> Agrawal D P, 2007. *The Indus Civilization: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi pp : 7, 63, 64

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, 64

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, J. 1931. *Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization*. Arthur Probsthain, London, pp Vol I :49,50,58,60

due to the larger number of phallus<sup>66</sup> like objects made variously of alabaster, shell , limestone, faience, paste, etc., including those found due to later excavations at the earlier excavated sites and also newer sites like Kalibanga, Dholavira, and Rakhigarhi. Importantly the Vedic Aryans in contiguous neighborhood during the late Rgvedic period with the Harappans is critical about the latter and derides the phallus worshippers.

Even in the first brushes with the civilization amongst other things as pointed out by Dhavalikar<sup>67</sup> the earliest literature mentions that they were faithless (*asraddha*), non- sacrificing (*ayajna*) and without any rituals (*avrata*), observed other rites(*anya-vrata*), were phallus worshippers and opposed the cult of Indra as also the sacrifice of animals in sacred fire, is very much indicative of the elements of Jainism and Saivism, prevalent in the civilization in different context than the socio-religious framework of the Vedic Aryans materially represented by the COP Culture. If the above is not tenable then a couple of question arises where are the material remains of the Vedic Aryans? And who are the peoples they are critical about? Some scholars like Ramchandran<sup>68</sup> and Craven<sup>69</sup> have suggested that the nude standing figure from Harappa reported by

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<sup>66</sup> Lal, B.B.1997 *The Earliest Civilization of South Asia*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, pp, 225

<sup>67</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K. 2007 *The Aryans: Myth and Archaeology* Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi p.49

<sup>68</sup> Ramchandran, T.N.1957 Harappa and Jainism. *Anekant* year 14 pp 157-161.

<sup>69</sup> Craven C. Roy. (1992) *Indian Art*, Thames and Hudson.. pp. 23,24.



Marshall<sup>70</sup> could as well be representing a Jain Tirthankar. It is not that this figure alone is Jaina in affinity as Deshpande<sup>71</sup> has drawn attention towards the suggestions of earlier scholars relating to standing figures in *kayotsarg* posture depicted on Harappan seals in the Jaina tradition. Thus in art antecedents the egalitarian Harappans with depiction of deity figures in *kayotsarg* and other calm, composed demeanor is much different from the COP Culture depictions with akimbo arms and feet wide apart. This has implications in art but first the different sets of peoples in the proto- historic world, has to be fully appreciated.

Other key difference perceptible through Vedas and its discordance with the Harappan Culture is with regard to depiction of women in literature and material remains. The literary evidence unravel a paucity of female deities in Rgvedic hymns except for the later accreted Mandalas by which time the Vedic Aryans was also being influenced by ethos of the larger region. In fact, Chakravarti<sup>72</sup> points out that it is only in the R.V. X -125 – a late Mandala- that the feminine form of Paramatma is actually indicated while Paramatma in most of the Vedic hymns is in the masculine gender. Few decades back, Lal<sup>73</sup> had literally

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<sup>70</sup> Marshall 1931 op.cited: p. 45, pl X)

<sup>71</sup> Deshpande, M.N. (1974) The Background and Tradition, A Ghosh (ed.). Jaina Art and Architecture, Vol I, Bhartiya Jnanpitha, New Delhi p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Chakravorty, A.K. 1983 The female Seers of the Rigveda. The Indian Historical Quaterly Vol XXXIX: 185-215

<sup>73</sup> Lal B.B 1978, The Indo-Aryan Hypotheses vis-a- vis Indian Archaeology *Journal of Central Asia Vol I No. 1* : 32.

summed up thus that in the Rigvedic religion 'there was hardly any pride of place for the female element'. Marshal<sup>74</sup> had hinted at the possibility of the Mother Goddess figures in the Harappan civilization. Later, Mackay<sup>75</sup>, in his report on Mohenjodaro also pointed out the presence of figures he described as Mother Goddess/Mother Earth. Others scholars like Atre<sup>76</sup> and Agrawal<sup>77</sup> had similar view, while Lal<sup>78</sup> states that 'the cult of fertility in some or other form may have existed in the Harappan religion' With regard to female representations on Harappan seals. Atre<sup>79</sup> states that 'the goddess was endowed with very defined iconographic attributes and had a full fledged cult organization forming the core of the Harappan religion'. The ethos of the two distinct peoples, especially pronounced in the proto-historic period, is perhaps best understood by the representation of women in available examples of art and literature. Although the representation of women is neither percentage wise nor in quality of the details uniform, but the main hub centers of the Harappan civilization has a higher proportion of female figures. The higher percentages of female figurines mentioned by Vats<sup>80</sup>, more than 70 years back that nearly two thirds of the

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<sup>74</sup> Marshal 1931 op. cited. Vol I : 49,50 & 339

<sup>75</sup> Mackay, E.J.H. 1938 Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro. Manager of Publications, Delhi pp.: 259,260,272,279,642,654

<sup>76</sup> Atre, S. 2002 Harappan Religion: Myth and Polemics, S. Settar and Ravi Korisetar (eds) Protohistory: Archaeology of the Harappan Civilization ICHR, Manohar Publishers and Distributors,

<sup>77</sup> Agrawal, D.P. 2007 op.cited p.6

<sup>78</sup> Lal 1997 op. cited 225,226.

<sup>79</sup> Atre, S., 2002 op.cited 200,201

<sup>80</sup> Vats, M.S. 1940 Excavation at Harappa, Government of India Press, Calcutta, p. 292

figures at Harappa are female has again been strongly reiterated by George Dales<sup>81</sup> that nearly 79.1 percent human figurines found from the recent excavations are that of females. The anomalous high numbers of female figurines in the Harappan civilization is backed by claims by several authors that some of these representations both in terracotta as well as seals are actually female divinities. The preponderance of female depictions in the main Harappan sites cannot be without its significance in the mindsets of the people of the civilization. According to Mackay<sup>82</sup>, a seal from Mohenjodaro shows a tree-goddess or spirit in a *pipal*- tree with seven ministrants each dressed in a short kilt. The tree spirit is apparently nude. On the nudity aspect of some female figures, Mackay<sup>83</sup> tells that it should not surprise anyone as it is one characteristic of Earth or Mother-goddess and that the wide girdle or brief skirt is of the transition period when garments were regarded as adding dignity. The Earth or Mother Goddess held fort for long as would be seen millenniums later. In fact, Saivism and the preponderant female depictions as deities or semi divinities or even as ordinary women, is a feature that cannot be given less importance. Both the aspects of Harappan Civilization have been strongly reflected in the religious imagery of the country.

Scholars after scholars to prove that the Aryans were the builders of the Harappan civilization have brought to attention many fire places they claim to be

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<sup>81</sup> Dales, G.F.and J.M. Kenoyer 1993. The Harappan Project 1986-1989: New Investigation at an ancient Indus City. G. L. Possehl (ed) Harappan Civilization: A Recent Perspective. op cited p. 502.

<sup>82</sup> Mackay1938 op.cited pp. 337,338

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p. 265

'fire altars' and in the eagerness to prove the same have messed it all beyond redemption. The wide variety of sizes, shapes, materials of construction and objects found within besides the presence or absence of the central stele, attributed to 'fire altars' belies any standardization and symbolism so necessary in religious things. Jumping to the band wagon of fire altars scholars have forgotten to retain semblance of logic. Some instances like other context of the fire places within the country and beyond the border has not exactly dampened the spirits of the 'fire altar' hopefuls. Curiously, the excavations at Inamgaon- a chalcolithic site- revealed that the stele<sup>84</sup> standing in the center of the fire pit was an ubiquitous feature. On the basis of finding of a clay pan (*tawa*) joined to the clay stump, and a base of a jar on another stump, Dhavalikar<sup>85</sup> (1995: 5-9) has suggested that the steles were used 'to support the cooking vessel in the fire pit'. Pertinently, no one has yet claimed it as sacrificial 'fire altars', even when, these are having central stele, as these chalcolithic sites are not as glorious as the Harappan sites with which most want to claim antecedents even if the claims may be entirely out of context. Similarly, in the recent excavations at Tarkhanwala Dera<sup>86</sup>, a Harappan site in Rajasthan, fire places, exactly similar to those described as fire-altars elsewhere have been mentioned as pottery kiln due to the large number of pottery in it, shows the great amount of subjective wishful interpretation of certain scholars, who are bent upon declaring most fire place as

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<sup>84</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K. 1995 Fire Altars or Fire Pits? L.K. Srinivasan (ed.), Sri Nagabhinandanam, M.S.Nagaraja Felicitation Committee, Bangalore. pp 5-9

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Trivedi, P.K. and J.K. Patnaik. 2003-2004. Tarkhanewala Dera and Chak 86 (2003-2004) *Puratattva* 34: 31.

'fire altars' without rhyme or reason. While as in many other cultures world over sacrifices have been and are being offered through the agency of fire, in Harappan civilization also the same cannot be ruled out, but in view of the extreme paucity of other corroborating evidence these necessarily have not to be ascribed to the Aryans. Moreover, a few that could have been actual 'fire altars' has been lost in deluge of almost all type of fire places being arbitrarily declared as 'fire altars by some eager scholars.

Paradoxically another characteristic feature of the Aryan society is the dominant role of the horse, mentioned in the Rgveda 215 times<sup>87</sup> and noticed only from very few sites from amidst hundreds of Harappan and Late Harappan sites. Although, most scholars agree to agree on the evidence of horse in the Harappan levels, there are others who question the 'contextual integrity' of the horse remains as according to them 'there are no convincing depictions of either horse or camel in Harappan iconography'<sup>88</sup>. According to Dhavalikar<sup>89</sup> 'the sporadic occurrence of horse at Harappan sites indicates that the animal was not common but extremely rare,' and the animal came in as a novelty towards the end of the Mature Harappan and thereafter seen in Late Harappan and later sites

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<sup>87</sup> Dhavalikar 2007 op.cited 63

<sup>88</sup> Meadow, R. H. and A.K. Patel 2002 From Mehargarh to Harappa and Dholavira: Prehistoric Pastoralism in North Western South Asia through the Harappan Period, Protohistory, op.cited, pp 391-403.

<sup>89</sup> Dhavalikar\2007op.cited, p.110

with greater frequency. Dhavalikar<sup>90</sup>, comments, 'if the Harappans had such a noble animal like horse, they would have definitely depicted it in their art. But that not being the case, we must agree with Wheeler who boldly put it: "No horse, no Aryans"'. Even if one or two contextual evidence of horse is found in the mature Harappan context one has not to run around in the streets naked shouting Eureka, I have found true horse in the Harappan context as such a situation is very much possible considering the vast network of travel and trade the Harappans had during their heydays. However, given the fact that between the 570 mature<sup>91</sup> Harappan sites not even ten uncontested evidence of true horse- a critical evidence of Aryan society- is available in spite of the fact that Harappan Archaeology is fast inching towards a century of its existence, shows the state of things clearly. Considering the fact that Rgveda mentions horse 215 times, at least half as many evidence from many mature Harappan sites would have made it to be given due cognizance, unless of course some scholars want to place the sparse and contested specimens, like evidence in a criminal case.

Another enigma is the strange paucity of the rhinoceros in the Rgveda while in the Harappan civilization the animal has numerous depictions that too in diverse mediums. As rhinoceros on seals, is commonly known from Harappan

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Sahi, M.D.N. 2006-2007, OCP Its Late Harappan Concept: Re-examined. *Puratattva* 37: 157.

sites like: Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Allahadino<sup>92</sup> etc. and from Harappan affinity sites like Shortughai<sup>93</sup> and Tell Asmar<sup>94</sup>. Terracotta images of the animal are commonly reported from several Harappan sites. In fact, recent excavations at Harappa have brought to light terracotta images of rhinoceros<sup>95</sup> which is more than twice the numbers compared to images of sheep and goat clubbed together. Other medium of expression representing the animal include, copper tablet<sup>96</sup> and terracotta masks found from Mohenjo-Daro<sup>97</sup>. The several medium of expression and numerous depictions of the animal not only indicate the humid Harappan environment but also the continuity of ancient traditions albeit modified from the earlier two- dimensional rock art to the later three - dimensional forms. It is amazing that the animal [rhinoceros] which has paucity of reference in Rgveda has numerous representations and even bones of the animals from the Harappan Civilization, while the animal [horse] which has numerous references in the literature has paucity of credible material remains in the civilization. While

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<sup>92</sup> Fairservis, W.A. 1993 Allahadino: An Excavation of a small Harappan Site. In *Harappan Civilization: A Recent Perspective*. Gregory L. Possehl (ed), Oxford & I.B.H. Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.107-112

<sup>93</sup> Francfort, H.P., 1984. The Harappan Settlement of Shortughai in *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*, in B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds) *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization* op. cited, pp301-310

<sup>94</sup> Lamberg-Karlovsky, C.C.1982. Sumer, Elam and the Indus: Three Urban Processes Equal One Structure? G. L. Possehl (ed) *Harppan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*, op.cited, pp 61-68

<sup>95</sup> Dales, and Kenoyer, M. 1993 op. cited 502, 505.

<sup>96</sup> Ratnagar, S. 2004. *Writing and Artistic Expression, in Ancient and Medieval Societies* I.G.N.O.U., Delhi p 42

<sup>97</sup> Dhavlikar, M.K. 1984. Sub Indus Cultures of Central and Western India, B.B. Lal and S.P. Gupta (eds) *Frontiers of the Indus Civilization*. op.cited p 250.

rhinoceros is quite popularly depicted in Jaina and Buddhist depictions and a lone specimen of possible continuities with regard to rhinoceros and Saivism is seen in a rock painting from Kathothiya in District Sehore. It would not be out of place to recall herein the animals around the *yogic* figure in the seal mooted as depicting proto –Siva also has a rhinoceros in the composition. However, curiously, the rhinoceros, to the knowledge of the present author and concurring with the paucity of reference in Rgveda, the animal is never seen associated with art related to Vaishnavism.

Not only to show the different diasporas, initially but the difference in ethos that led to difference in art is also perceptible along the millenniums. In matters of attire also including the headdress or the lack of it the Harappans and the Rgvedic people had different styles. According to Dhavalikar<sup>98</sup>, both men and women of the Vedic Aryans ‘wore their hair long and tied them in a knot on the top of the head’ while some dressed it into braids and wore them on their right side of the head. While some wore a conical or more appropriately said a pointed headdress. Pertinently, unlike the elaborate head dress of the female figurines seen in the Harappan context, Tiwari<sup>99</sup> mentions that ‘in Vedic texts there is only

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<sup>98</sup> Dhavalikar, M.K. 2007op.cited, p. 62

<sup>99</sup> Tiwari Pushpa 1983 Social Significance of Head-dresses on the Early Terracotta Female Figurines of Kausambi *Prachya Pratibha Vol No. 1-2*: pp. 78



one reference of usnisa in connection with the goddess Indrani (Satpatha Brahmana, XVI 2.1.8)' She points out few other terms for male and possible words which could be suggestive of female head dresses. However as pointed out by her that 'there is not a single female figurine which does not depict some type of head dress' as seen in the early terracotta female figurines of Kausambi while on the other hand 'Manusmriti refers to them as belonging to low professionals and among the despised groups of people,' show that the cultural differences and aversions continued among the different peoples as brought to attention by Manu, even though interactions had started nearly two millenniums before, between the Harappan and the COP culture people. On the other hand Agrawal<sup>100</sup> mentions that male figures are frequently 'depicted nude, but wearing turbans or headdresses.' Mackay<sup>101</sup> speaks in superlative of the 'elaborate headdress that form such a distinctive feature of the Indus Valley' female figurines. The Harappan figurines<sup>102</sup> also are depicted with 'long hair tied in a bun on back of the head', or as 'combed back in straight lines or parted in the middle'. Tiwari<sup>103</sup> mentions that 'the practice of wearing head dress especially among females continued from the days of Harappan civilization' but 'failed to find popularity with the people of higher ranks and repute of Aryan society'. This, needless to say was due to the ingrained cultural differences of the two diasporas.

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<sup>100</sup> Agrawal, D.P., 2007 op.cited, p.222

<sup>101</sup> Mackay 1938 op.cited, p. 654

<sup>102</sup> Agrawal, D.P. 2007 op.cited. p.148.

<sup>103</sup> Tiwari, Pushpa 1983 op.cited p. 78

The material of draping oneself also differed significantly. Pertinently, Chaturvedi<sup>104</sup> also points out that ‘the most striking thing amongst all these terms is the absence of a word for cotton, otherwise known to be prevalent in the Indus Valley civilization’. He<sup>105</sup> further elaborates the word *urna* in Vedic literature as below: ‘It appears that the root *urnu* initially designated a clothing of sheep-skin as the Greco-Latin tradition provides, but later on when the techniques of shearing, weaving and knitting were fully known, it came to be employed for woolen clothing’. Even conceding the possibility of knowledge of cotton among early Vedic Aryans one notes that the tradition of using animal products including, skin as clothing - earlier habituated across generations due to the backdrop of colder climates - has been evidently followed in the the Vaishnava sect, without inhibition. Thus, the Vishnudharmottara Purana, with regard to the image of Vamana, besides other mandatory things, tells that he should wear black antelope skin.<sup>106</sup> Singh,<sup>107</sup> has brought to attention an early sculpture of the Gupta period wherein the Vamana image wears a deer-skin. Similarly in the Dasavatara Temple

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<sup>104</sup> Chaturvedi P.S.1998-99 A Profile of Textile Technology in the Vedic Literature *Prachya Pratibha Vol XX:26,27*

<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, 26

<sup>106</sup> Singh, S. B. 1977 Brahmanical Icons in Northern India, Sagar Publications, New Delhi:78, 79

<sup>107</sup> *ibid* :78

at Deogarh both the figures of the Nara-Narayana panel wear antelope skins<sup>108</sup> like the Brahma figure in the Sheshashaiya Vishnu panel of the same temple. Similarly Parshurama-avatara figures draped in deer skin is also not wanting for examples, being recommended in the canons<sup>109</sup>. The influence spread even to Buddhism wherein some figures are shown clad in deer skin.<sup>110</sup> But, on the other hand, due to total opposition to violence in any form, the Jain depictions are not known to have any animal skin representations in spite of the cross currents of influences that had affected Buddhist and Saiva iconography in this matter.

A comparison of the two diasporas shows the different ethos and the continuities thereof running deep in the respective following generations. Summing up the enumerations on ethical and ethnic difference it is asserted herein that amongst others, two definite streams namely: Harappan Civilization and Vedic COP Culture with their different beliefs and ways of life, the art therein powered very conspicuously later trends initially in an isolated manner. On the other hand the initial aversions although clearly seen in earliest literature the later Brahmanical literature show distinct changes in the thinking perhaps due to the dominant thought and ethos of the populace at large. Much later, with greater interactions there was common acceptance of deities from both the

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<sup>108</sup> Desai, K. 1973 *Iconography of Vishnu*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. pp. 145,146

<sup>109</sup> Gupte, R.S., 1972. *Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains* D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd, Bombay, pp. 33.

<sup>110</sup> Willis Michael 2000 *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India*, British Museum Press, London Fig. 63

peoples and also adoption of art forms from each other. Syncretic endeavors were underway and art forms were being utilized by those unknown or averse to it. But there were reservations also against being influenced by art that was not in consonance with particular way of life with the community concerned.

## **HARAPPAN ETHOS AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN ART**

The difference in the style of depiction of the Harappan figures and imagery about the Vedic society obtained from the core Rgvedic hymns is not less significant. According to Jansen,<sup>111</sup> male deity like figures from the civilization ‘whose statuesque sitting postures convey tranquility and meditation suggesting a ritual significance’ and the ‘simpler male figurines are represented in a pose which strongly suggests a gesture of adoration’. These are early evidence of meditation, done by the deities and *gurus*, being continued in the religious tradition of the subcontinent; while the lesser mortals follow the religious figures in adoration. Lal<sup>112</sup> asserts that ‘in the Harappan Civilization there is not much evidence of military equipment and, therefore, it would be unwarranted to visualize a separate warrior class in it’ which is in much contrast to the assemblage of the

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<sup>111</sup> Jansen, A.A.2002 The Terracotta Figurines from Mohenjo-Daro: Considerations on Tradition, Crafts and Ideology in the Harappan Civilization(c 2400-1800 BC) *Protohistory: Archaeology of the Harappan Civilization* op.cited pp.210-212.

<sup>112</sup> Lal 1997op.cited, 277

Copper Hoards, with swords, spears and hatchets, appears to be militarily attuned. He,<sup>113</sup> albeit, in a different context, also brings to attention several male figures with folded hands from Harappa and Mohenodaro, which is so unlike the anthropomorphic figures of the COP Culture. Contemplation, meditation and generally peaceful disposition could be understood by the figures on the seals and terracotta figures and the less number of military equipment found in the Harappan civilization. This was a pervasive aspect of the Harappan Civilization and trickled down to later times. Basham,<sup>114</sup> mentions in this context, that the 'earthbound and materialistic Brahmanism' slowly and steadily felt the 'great development of asceticism and mysticism' and found it hard 'to ignore' so much so the 'accounts of the discussion and teachings of some of the more orthodox of the early mystics were collected and added to the Brahmanas as Aranyakas and Upanisads'. The COP Culture people were having different ethos and religious philosophy initially but with greater interactions with the Harappans and their descendants and other affiliated people who did not belong to the region circumscribed as Harappans, they were swamped by new thoughts, which came to be reflected in the later Mandalas. The same phenomenon has been expressed by Allchin<sup>115</sup> as under: 'a problematic gulf appears to separate the narrow Indo-Iranian, polytheistic ideology postulated by philologists as that of the early Vedic

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<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, 278

<sup>114</sup> Basham, A.L. 1967. *The Wonder that was India*. Sidgwick & Jackson, London p 246

<sup>115</sup> Allchin, F.R. 1993 *The Legacy of the Indus Civilization* George L Possehl, (ed) *Harappan Civilization: A Recent Perspective* (Second Revised Edition) Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd New Delhi p. 392

hymns, from both the mature “Indian” character of the “late” hymns of the first and tenth Mandalas of the Rigveda’. He further mentions that the gulf may be partly illusory but it undoubtedly exists. The continuing process of assimilating new ideas and philosophy is prominently seen, therefore, by the time of Upanishads, evidently, the cross currents of influence was being felt also by the descendants of the Rgvedic Aryans.

One need not reiterate the presence of Siva Linga, ithyphallic terracotta figures, and the lord of beasts seals mooted as proto- Siva from Harappan civilization to show the antecedents of Saivism and its predominance in Indian society and religious art. It is the lesser known aspects that are being dwelt herein so as to place them in the correct context vis a vis Vaishnava art. In the Sramanical religions both Buddhism and Jainism the representation of women and female deities are conspicuous by its presence, while the representations in Vaishnava contexts is marked by the general lack of feminine depictions. This has its antecedents in the proto-historic period. Whereas from the Harappan times female deities are known but the general paucity of references about women and female deities in the Rgveda, and not contradicted by the archaeological remains obtained in COP Culture context shows the different mental make-ups of the two. The fallout of the Harappan civilization in terms of art is best visualized in the Saivite, Buddhist and Jaina contexts. The latter two religions, along with Saivism, especially, have a large number of depictions and literary references of female deities and demi-goddesses that is clearly traceable from the Harappan backdrop **[Fig-6]**. This is in no small measure the continuity of the Mother Goddess/ Earth

goddess the term coined by Mackay with reference to the figures from Harappan Civilization.

These include goddess on lotus holding lotus as at Bharhut and Sanchi, goddess being anointed by elephants (*gajabhishikta-devi*) as at Bodhgaya, Bharhut and Sanchi **[Fig-7]** for example in Buddhist context, and at Udayagiri-Khandagiri, in Jaina context. Although the *gajabhishikta-devi* was a prominent feature in Buddhist and Jaina context it is only later in the Gupta period that the depiction came to be known as Gaja-Lakshmi<sup>116</sup> and became particularly associated with Vaishnavism. In fact it is due to the overwhelming influence and acknowledgement of this goddess including in the folk and Sramanical contexts that Vaishnavas also acknowledged and incorporated the same as Gaja-Lakshmi. Pertinently, scholars have a penchant for mentally retrofitting Lakshmi in Buddhist contexts when Vishnu himself is not depicted at all not as any aversion but due to the fact that even if the Vedic gods are depicted it is Indra who is depicted in the early art, as seen in many panels at Sanchi in 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and thereabout, as Vishnu had not risen to all round popularity as late as 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE. Secondly, Lakshmi, who is rarely referred in Vedic literature with Vishnu, who himself has not yet arrived fully on the religious art scene, and obviously therefore she was being emphasized less in Vaishnavism itself. It is paradoxical that neither Vishnu was so popular compared to Indra in the pre Christian Era

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<sup>116</sup> Suresh, K.M. 1999 *Iconography of Vishnu from Khajuraho*, Bhartiya Kala Prakashan, Delhi pp.107,108.

centuries nor was Lakshmi so much referred in early literature yet scholars can think of the said Gaja-Lakshmi outnumbering the presently known early coeval figures of Vishnu from the entire subcontinent, and that too, in Sramanical art, which obviously is non Vaishnava in context. To elaborate the above further, from the time when *Pancavira* concept (Vasudeva-Krsna, Samkarshana, Pradyumna, Samba, Aniruddha) was in vogue to developments in the following centuries, in early Vaishnava depictions Vishnu is represented as all male religious imagery as Vasudeva along with Balrama only, or as Chaturbhuj Vishnu of Malhar. Pertinently, a closer look at the exquisite Varaha image of Udayagiri (Distt. Vidisha), MP, also shows the paucity of females being depicted in the scores of male gods and *rishis* shown witnessing the saving of the Goddess Earth the grand feat of Vishnu. The point is that it is due to the influence of the Sramanical background that such earlier negation of the feminine aspects of universe got ameliorated in the Vaishnava religion, to some extent and the earlier depiction of the *gajabhisikta-devi* in Sramanical settings was patented as Gaja-Lakshmi in Vaishnavism. In effect the depiction of *gajabhisikta-devi* is a distinct influence of the Sramanical art especially on the Vaishnava art. The influence of Great Goddess, whether she be Mother Goddess or Earth Goddess was definitely there from the times of Harappan Civilization whether she be known as Vasundhara or be usurped and be known in the later neo-patented context as Lakshmi, her significance is acknowledged again and again- because of the overwhelming backdrop, from the Harappan times- even by those not originally inclined to



render due space to female goddesses. Agrawala<sup>117</sup> in his article 'A Note on Pitcher Carriers in Gaja- Lakshmi Reliefs' tells about a female deity lustrated by elephants found from sites like Amjhara and Dhoda with flanking (smaller) figures of Balarama and Vasudeva which according to the Visnudharmottara Purana is the canonical prescription for the Goddess Nidra. It may not be out of place to mention here a 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE stone image in Mathura Museum, in which Ardhanarishwar, Vishnu, Gaj Lakshmi and Kuber are shown in a row which not only signifies the independent existence of the goddess formerly, but also early attempts by the thinkers that be, to unify the different religious strands in one composite whole.

### **THE IMPACT OF COPPER ANTHROPOMORPHS**

The arms kept spread out and curved in toward the waist region, more often not touching it, with its variations, has been generally termed herein as akimbo, for the purpose of this article. The arms in akimbo position, portrayed in the images of the deities or the lack of it is a key difference in understanding the later portrayals and the antecedents of the same. The Rgvedic Aryans with different ethos and situation compared to the sedentary Harappans had different deities and different iconography. As Kumar<sup>118</sup> states, as long as the Rgvedic Aryans were residing in the Saptasindhavah, Varuna was the chief deity but as they expanded towards 'the Sarasvati and Ganga Valleys, they had to face the hostile non-Aryans,

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<sup>117</sup> Agrawala R.C. 2001-02 A Note on Pitcher Carriers in Gaja- Lakshmi Reliefs Kala Vol VIII :5-8

<sup>118</sup> Kumar , K. 2000 op. cited, p. 102

Indra became the foremost god. Indra was frequently invoked by the late Rgvedic Aryans' in their long drawn struggle with the non-Aryans (*dasa* or *dasyu*). Evidently, the *Indradhwaja* with folded hands of the Harappan art examples, could not have inspired confidence among the Aryans nor impressed the non-Aryans. Such was the success of this image that the later images of powerful Gods and Goddesses were invariably cast with akimbo arms. Thus, besides the images of Indra and Vishnu and his *avatars* there were many deities of non Vaishnavava lineage who were portrayed in this manner.

With more than a millennia of portrayal the akimbo effect had a stranglehold on the minds of the people in certain time and space, which also crossed over to depictions done by other communities wherever the artisans could not break free from this attribute in depicting deities, the same was fruitfully employed. The Great Mother (Earth) Goddess of yore was definitely waiting for eons to be portrayed in stone although she may have been portrayed in perishable mediums<sup>119</sup> in the meanwhile. Kumar,<sup>120</sup> has brought to attention many terracotta figurines of Mother Goddesses from several parts of the country. In the narrative of the terracotta Mother Goddesses a specimen exhibited in Allahabad Museum **[Fig- 8]** is interesting for the reason that it has akimbo disposition of the arms. Although nothing else other than the akimbo disposition of arms related to the possible divine pretensions is ascertainable the armllet on the left arm has interesting parallels in semi divine personages of the early

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<sup>119</sup> Kumar, K. 2000b op. cited, p.110

<sup>120</sup> ibid

historic period. Although, the Goddess Earth/Mother Goddess and all female deities as well as male deities of the Harappan civilization were being made with non-akimbo disposition of hands in the terracottas, stone sculptures besides seals but due to the stranglehold of the 'akimbo effect', any powerful deity perforce had to be depicted with akimbo disposition. This becomes clear at Sanchi wherein the depiction of Maya<sup>121</sup> under a parasol although being showered by elephants as like in *gajabhisikta-devi* scenes are more often not having arms held akimbo. On the other hand those female deities with or even without associated elephants are more often having hands held akimbo. The nudity aspect of such figures are often seen in some of the many figures of Sanchi alludes them to the Mother Goddesses. The significant number of these female deities including *gajabhisikta-devi* from Sanchi shows the significance of female element in the Buddhist society. It would not be much out of place here to mention the akimbo disposition of Shasthi Devi **[Fig- 9]** (in Mathura Museum) of Kushana period shown portrayed along with conjoint female figures, not only as an example of representation of powerful female deities much more in vogue before the advent of the Guptas but also that the copper anthropomorphs characteristic feature of the upper limbs have been used here also. Interestingly, the composition of the female deity figure is competing for attention with the Vishnu Vishvarupa figures **[Fig-10]** of the coeval period (also in Mathura Museum). Pertinently, several figures of Nagaraj in the Sanchi Museum, and the Boddhissattvas also show

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<sup>121</sup> Marshall and Foucher 1940 op.cited, LXXXVII (71a) & LVI)

various degrees of akimbo dispositions, but in the latter, the phenomenon is rather subdued.

The 'akimbo effect' had its influence on Buddhist art portrayal in some other areas more conspicuously. In general Buddhist figures were portrayed more or less in a manner with the arms closer to the body than being kept akimbo except when seated in *dhyana mudra* due to the natural spread of the arms caused by the bent elbows. A comparative study of the Buddhist and Vaishnava figures show the clear trend of the latter figures to be shown much more akimbo compared to the Buddhist images of the same time and space settings, if it be perceptible there in the first place. In this regard, while generally the images of Buddha are not shown akimbo as example many could be cited like those of Bhita and Sarnath<sup>122</sup> but in one hub-centre of Vaishnavism, namely the Mathura region, the artisans making the Buddhist sculptures could not break the mould of akimbo disposition of limbs so conspicuously seen in the neighborhood. Not only in the Bodhisattva figures but the Buddha figures also have limbs portrayed in a manner with conspicuously outward elbow that is much different from the Sarnath and Sanchi images as far as depiction of Buddha is concerned. In Mathura region art the akimbo effect or its modified versions, like Surya holding lotuses but with much outward elbows, the arms of the Buddha figures are not on the waist or thereabout but the elbows are farthest away from the body on some of the sculptures [Fig-11]. A seated Buddha image [Fig- 12] on a votive stupa kept in

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<sup>122</sup> Chandra, P.1970. *Stone sculptures in the Allahabad Museum*. American Institute of Indian Studies, Pune Fig 82, 209-211.

Mathura Museum has his left arm resting on the thigh and right arm in *abhaya-mudra* appear to be more like a wrestler assuring his cohorts, rather than a spiritual leader. The Jaina art in as much as it is related to Tirthankaras, on the other hand due to the particular ethics of the religion was not at all influenced by akimbo disposition (alluding to physical power) of the copper anthropomorphs and its impact seen in art on stone and terracotta, except for figures like those of Indra and Naigamesa portrayed in the wider composition in the Jaina religious imagery. Figures of Siva also do not show akimbo disposition of arms, except rarely where it is necessitated by the action portrayed in the image. This may be because of the fact that Saiva iconography was developing from the Harappan times on its own and did not require prototypes and neither Siva was required to be shown as powerful on the basis of the outline of Vaisnava images in the early historic period. Herein, it should be made clear that although the carving of the female deities and Buddhist images- especially in Mathura region with regard to the latter were definitely influenced by the spillover of the copper anthropomorph imagery, it is not that the Buddhist art was uni-directionally influenced by the lingering influence of the copper anthropomorphs continued in Vaishnava art, as there are umpteen examples of Vaishnava art being influenced by Buddhist art.

## **THE BUDDHIST ART INFLUENCE ON VAISHNAVA ART**

It is a fact that Buddhist and Jaina art had a head-start and they were creating magnificent religious edifices embellished with depiction of social scenes, myths,

ornamental motifs etc, these were copiously incorporated in the Brahmanical shrines including those related to Vaishnavism in no small measure. Several Buddhist<sup>123</sup> site including Sanchi, and Bodhgaya has a flower motif with intermittent opposite facing buds/small flowers in the space available between the flowers. The railing of Stupa no.2, Sanchi carved out in 2<sup>nd</sup> Cent. BCE [Fig- 13] and later in the single gateway around Stupa no 3 dated to 1<sup>st</sup> cent CE have these frieze. A very similar frieze of motifs is seen more than five centuries later in the Brahmanical Caves at Udayagiri in District Vidisha, MP, after this art was first incorporated on architecture at Sanchi. At Dashavtara temple, Deogadh [Fig- 14], in Uttar Pradesh also the frontal facing flowers are seen with small flowers/buds in the intervening spaces between the flowers and the border. Thus the continuity of motifs of the Buddhist art done in Sunga-Satavahana period is known from the same motifs being replicated in the Brahmanical temples of the Gupta period. Another common feature besides the well known *chaitya*-windows is the rafter ends which were quite common in Buddhist art at Sanchi representing architecture. Similarly the row of arches, were also represented on top of the architectural members often borne by the rafters, frequently both of which have continued as a diminished motif like at Udayagiri, Deogadh and Nachna other than those seen as *chaitya* windows in the elevation of later temples. While, on the other hand Bateshwar in Morena District and Teli ka Mandir on Gwalior Fort besides several other shrines show ample evidence of show ample evidence of rafter ends later after the Gupta period.

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<sup>123</sup> Agrawala, V.S. 1965, Indian Art. Prithivi Prakashan Varanasi Pl. LXIV

Other interesting compositions that have continued far in time and absorbed by art of other denominations include the lion riders of Sanchi and the semi-divine, dwarf like beings spewing out vegetation from their mouth or navel area. At Sanchi, the West Gate, Stupa no 1 (1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE) has a depiction of winged lions portrayed with human beings riding it, while in Stupa no. 3 the wings are not depicted. Farther away in time and space at Nachna, in Panna District, the beasts have horns and are shown with a man astride on each of them. The similarity of composition giving leeway for some changes due to the intervening centuries is remarkable. However, at Sanchi, the same side of the West Gate, Sanchi Stupa no. 1 has one image of lion riders wherein lions are having both wings and horns, it is not unlikely at around this time- or somewhat later- the horned lions but those without wings were also conceived and executed, the types of which was a ready prototype for the Nachna composition many centuries later. As by the time of the art at the latest of the three stupas, viz: Stupa no. 3 the winged terrestrial animals were not as popular in art as during the earlier art at Stupa no. 1. At Stupa no.1 and 3, depictions of dwarf spewing out vegetation from mouth are seen. However, there is one depiction which is somewhat different wherein the dwarf is generating flora from the navel area as from umbilical cord. This sole depiction at Sanchi **[Fig- 15]** Stupa no. 2 the earliest of the surviving specimens of Sanchi is quite close to the Dashavatara Temple, Deogadh**[Fig- 14]** ]and Nachna compositions. Curiously, while the earliest specimen of the pertinent art has vegetation coming out from the umbilical spot, at Stupa no. 2 – to be seen again at Deogadh and Nachna more than 500 years

later, the later depictions- at Sanchi itself show the same phenomenon of vegetation issuing from mouth except for one partial example at South Gate, of Stupa no.1 where the semi-divine being on the right shows a protrusion which seems to hint the possibility of the emanation of vegetation from the navel area. It seems that like the various types of lion riders with lions having/not having horns and wings different types of dwarfs issuing vegetation were being believed by people and produced on popular demand or by choice of the artist. The various versions of the themes and images seen at Sanchi continued in imagination and art therefore were produced at Deogadh and Nachna, after many centuries. Closer home to Nachna, a roundel from Bharhut dated to 1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE shows a dwarf with two lotus stems emanating from his umbilical spot.

There are several examples- some clearly visualized, others apparently possible- which have been taken into Vaishnava context. An example of the nascent elements in the much later depicted Gajendra-moksha scene is already apparent as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> cent BCE, at Sanchi albeit in a non Vaishnava context. These include depictions of elephants raising lotus/lotus bunches, handling lotus with its trunk as seen in the railings of Stupa no 2, Sanchi (2<sup>nd</sup> cent BC). While, a much more closer scene to the later portrayed Gajendramoksha scene is seen on top architrave facing south of the north gate, Sanchi (1<sup>st</sup> cent BCE) wherein flowers are raised in honour of Buddha Buddha as is conventional during the earlier period is represented by tree and parasol. Importantly, the elephants on both sides are shown in knee deep water and a crocodile on prowl is moving between the legs of an elephant. One is tempted to assert that there may have



been such scenes in the intervening period before the first carving of the Gajendra-moksha scene in the Vaishnava context wherein the elephant has been caught by the crocodile and it raises a lotus to the Buddha in the human form. But this suggestion unless substantiated by actual finds would evidently remain in the realm of conjecture. Although, the above contention appears to be a flight of imagination of the present author, the number of examples mentioned below, showing varying degrees of assimilation of motifs and imageries by the artists portraying the Vaishnava themes would definitely convince even the orthodox scholars, of the definite influence of Buddhist art on Vaishnava art.

The art form, namely of the Sheshasana Vishnu and for that matter Sheshashaiya Vishnu is already seen several hundred years earlier, albeit in the Buddhist context in the Stupa no. 2 at Sanchi and Pauni.<sup>124</sup> A much more obvious depiction is seen in the Bharhut railings (now in Allahabad museum) wherein on a pillar a multi-hooded image of a serpent beneath a tree has a seat well placed between the coils of the body and lower down Buddhapada are shown explicitly symbolized by the *chakra* in the footprints. Fortunately, Muchilinda Nagaraja is inscribed above this composition. This has in effect prevented possible claim of certain scholars who could, without any qualms, retrofit it as early Sheshanaga depiction, and Vishnu represented by Vishnupada symbolized by presence of *chakra*, inspite of the Buddhist settings of Bharut, like *gajabhishikta-devi* of the Sramanical context being identified as Gaja-Lakshmi. There are several scenes at Sanchi which depict Muchilinda in the anthropomorphic form with the multi-

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<sup>124</sup> Indian Archaeology 1968-69: A Review pp 14-16 Pl XVII A

hooded snake behind his head. The architrave of the lone gateway of Stupa no. 3 (1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE) show two compositions of Muchilinda with his queen(s) and other paraphernalia associated with royal person. In the west end composition in the south facing architrave he holds a lotus in the right hand (*padmahasta*) and is not much different from the Deogadh lintel figure of Sheshasana Vishnu (5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). Besides the fact that later depiction which is four handed, the important change from the earlier composition is that the female counterpart seated equally is now shown at the feet, while the human garland bearers at ground level (Stupa no. 2 composition) is replaced by *vidyadharas* who are airborne. It is not unlikely that airborne garland bearers were shown around Muchilinda where he is portrayed as protecting Buddha. Pratapaditya Pal<sup>125</sup> mentions examples of Buddha in the human form, protected by Muchilinda, from Nagarjunakonda and Amravati dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE. Thus the latter types are quite close to the Seshasanavishnu, while Sheshshaiya Vishnu is the reclining form of the former. Even Muchilinda seated under his own hood with one hand holding the lotus in the Sanchi depiction [Fig- 16] is close enough, a ready prototype, for replication as Vishnu by replacing the turban by *kiritmukuta* and including a pair of additional limbs.

At Sanchi, Stupa no. 2, [Fig- 17] a depiction shows a stout figure uprooting two slender trees. It appears that the depiction is close to the later portrayed

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<sup>125</sup> Pratapaditya Pal 2007 Inscribed Naga Protected Buddha from Thailand in Buddhist Art: Form and meaning Marg Vol 58-No 3 :59,60 and Figs 10 and 11.

Yamalarjuna trees being uprooted by Krishna. A much later composition from Khajuraho dated to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE shows Krishna uprooting the Yamalarjuna trees with his hands in a similar manner as seen at Sanchi without the quern retains some similarities. In sacred literature of the Vaishnavas the association of *chakra* with Vishnu goes back to remote antiquity, in art also *chakra* is associated from early times with Vishnu or his incarnations as in early rock painting of Krishna and Balarama, found near the village of Tikula in the Gwalior District, rock engraving at a site close to the city of Chilas in northern Pakistan, Indo- Greek coins from Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan issued by the Indo Greek King Agathocetes, who ruled from 180 till 170 BCE and Malhar Vishnu dated to 2<sup>nd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> cent BCE. However, *chakra* on pillar is seen earlier in Buddhist context like on Ashokan pillars as at Sarnath and Sanchi besides on pillar carvings of Buddhist railings at many sites from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC onwards. Vaishnava affiliation of *chakra* on pillar<sup>126</sup> (*chakra-dhwaja*) has also been known. Curiously, at Eran in Sagar district a *Garuddhwaja*, of the Gupta period, with the vehicle of Vishnu portrayed on the top of the pillar has a large *chakra* placed more conspicuously, which is in close similarity to the *chakras*, placed on top of elephants, lions atop the pillars, from Mauryan period onwards in the Buddhist context. Frequently, one sees exact resemblance of the attire of the Buddha including headgear with spirally curved in hair and *ushnisha* in the incarnations of Vishnu where he is portrayed as an ascetic. While to portray Buddha in the form of Buddha in the ten incarnations of Vishnu is very much natural, the fact that Vamana **[Fig- 18]** also is portrayed very

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<sup>126</sup> Balasubhramaniam, R. and Meera Dass. 2004. On the astronomical significance of the Delhi Iron Pillar Current Science, Vol. 86, No. 8: 1134-1142.

similar like Buddha as at Khajuraho, shows the extent of influence of Buddhist art on Vaishnava art – at least in some regions. Herein it is needless to re-enumerate the incorporation of *gajabhisikta-devi* portrayed by the Sramanas in the imagery of Brahmanical religion as Gaja-Lakshmi.

## **CONCLUSION**

The religious art and its peripherals had diverse antecedents not only due to the different nucleic populace, naturally having distinct divergent beliefs. These can be traced back amongst others, from two distinct sources namely the Harappan Civilization and the COP Culture. The different beliefs, ways of life, situations have percolated down as two different strands - albeit initially- and subsequently started influencing each other to a significant extent. The major differences are very much discernible by the extreme disconnect between literature and material evidence of the Rgveda and the Harappan Civilization on the one hand and the significant concurrences of the COP Culture and the earliest of the Vedic literature. Scholars bent upon proving that the Vedic people were the authors of the Harappan Civilization do repeatedly prop up evidence like: plethora of fire places as ' fire-altars'; sparse, circumspect evidence of horse in mature Harappan context. Besides Vedic Harappan proponents choose to remain mute about anomalous high numbers of female depiction in Harappan Civilization in contradistinction to evidence obtained from Rgveda, except for the later *mandalas*, by which time interaction with population at large had started. No comments are forth coming from such lobbyists regarding the paucity of mention of rhinoceros in earliest literature, whereas the civilization has its evidence in

abundance. There are many other aspects like the representation of water buffalo, rhinoceros, elephant, tiger, crocodile, fish and presence of large number of fish bones, evidence of rice cultivation, 'adaptive polymorphism against endemic malaria'<sup>127</sup> , which definitely stresses on the evidence of humid Harappan environment but the literature under reference does not support the same. On the other hand the COP Culture which had the dominant God Indra is well represented by the depiction of the copper anthropomorphs. Secondly, if it was not for the Linga worshippers of the Harappan Civilization whom were the Vedic seers being critical of? Rather than thinking of an illusory unified whole regarding the population of the sub-continent, the various inhabitants and their initial efforts in producing religious art should be given due cognizance.

From the time, B B Lal, associated the Copper Hoards with Ochre Colour Pottery in 1951 to the linking of the copper anthropomorphs by Krishna Kumar with Indra in 1987 and the recent linking of the therio-anthropomorphic figures found in Kheri Gujjar by Manjul and Arvin in 2007, and the present linking of the Atwa copper anthropomorphs as the Vedic Vishnu, all clues significantly and increasingly indicate that the COP Culture remains are the actual evidence of Late Rgvedic Aryans. This has not only given material evidence regarding the late Rgvedic people in the Indian context but also shows the nucleus of Vaishnava iconography, which is now traceable from nearly two millennia before the earliest

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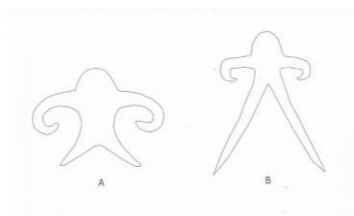
<sup>127</sup> . Kennedy, K.A.R.1982. Skulls, Aryans and flowing drains: The interface of Archaeology and Skeletal Biology in the Study of the Harappan Civilization, in G. L. Possehl (ed.) Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective, op.cited, pp 289-296.

known from rock art and coins. These assertions, further substantiate the separate origin of religious art of different sects which can be traced back to the earliest times, although later across the millennia due to the growing interactions and influences on each other the early streaks become faded.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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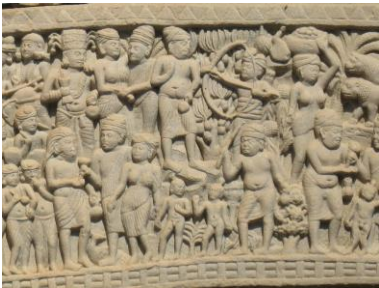
## **LIST OF FIGURES**



**FIG-1** Two of the many types of anthropomorphs found in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and surrounding region.



**FIG-2** Copper anthropomorph in Lucknow Museum



**FIG-3** Depiction of Indra with akimbo arms holding vajra on architrave of Stupa no. 1, Sanchi, Distt. Raisen, M.P.



**FIG-4** Therio-anthropomorphic figure from Kheri-Gujjar, in Haryana; identified as Varaha.



**FIG-5** Kushana period Varaha (Mathura Museum) with feet wide apart and akimbo arms similar to copper anthropomorphs.



**FIG-6** Preponderance of female images and presence of Siva Linga in Harappan Civilization (National Museum, Delhi)



**FIG-7** Female deity anointed by elephants, gajabhishikta-devi; one of many at Sanchi.





**FIG-8** Terracotta female figure showing akimbo disposition of arms (Allahabad Museum).



**FIG-9** Shasthi Devi showing akimbo disposition, in Mathura Museum.



**FIG-10** Chaturvyuha image of Vishnu, in Mathura Museum.



**FIG-11** Buddha with unusual outward elbows, in Mathura Museum.



**FIG-12** Buddha with unusual outward elbow, in Mathura Museum.



**FIG-13** Flowers with intervening buds facing away, Stupa no. 2, Sanchi.



**FIG-14** Flowers with intervening buds facing away and dwarf with sprouting of flora from umbilical area, Dashavatara Temple, Deogadh, UP.



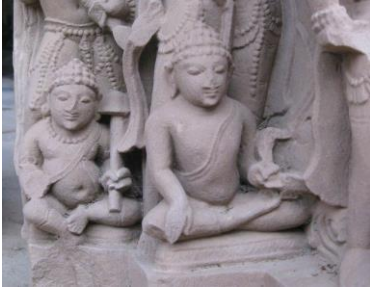
**FIG-15** Dwarf with sprouting of flora from umbilical area, Stupa no. 2, Sanchi.



**FIG-16** Muchilinda under his own hood, with queen, Stupa no. 3, Sanchi.



**FIG-17** An Yaksha like figure uprooting two trees, Stupa no. 2, Sanchi.



**FIG-18** Vamana shown like Buddha, Khajuraho, Distt. Chhattarpur, M.P.

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