CHAPTER I
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Ganeshā is one of the most well-known Hindu deities. His worship at the beginning of all rituals has made him more popular than many other divinities.

Worship of Ganeshā has transcended the frontiers of India and a large number of his images are known from various countries like Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Champa, China, Japan, Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, Ceylon, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Like India, his worship has been quite popular in the first mentioned country and is still a living tradition in Bali.

A number of scholars like Alice Getty, T.A. Gopinatha Rao, Amal Sarkar, I.K. Sarma, R.P. Yadava, A.K. Narain, M.K. Dhaavalikar, Paul B. Courtright, Arundhati Banerji, Edi Sedyawati etc. have produced good monographs and papers on Ganeshā images. Individual studies of various temple sites, books on Indian and Indonesian arts, articles concerning Ganeshā statues in different museums of the two countries have also been published. There is, however, no work available on the comparative study of the images of the god coming from India and Indonesia. The present researcher, therefore, feels that such a study is a great desideratum and worth the labour.

The main purpose of the study is to bring out the resemblances and iconographical traits of Ganeshā images belonging to the two countries under review. While the resemblances may indicate the provenance of the impact
from which the Indonesian images take their form, the peculiarities, as well as the innovation, may point out the local genius. Since most of the images belonging to Indonesia are datable from 7th to 15th century A.D., we have limited our study to this period only with casual references to earlier images in India.

The researcher has collected data by going through the available publications and also visiting various important museums of the two countries. The important museums he has visited in India are, among others, the National Museum New Delhi; Mathura Museum; Gwalior Museum; State Museum Lucknow; Bharat Kala Bhavan at Varanasi; Patna Museum; Asutosh Museum, Calcutta University; Indian Museum, Calcutta; Government Museum & Art Gallery, Chandigarh and the National Museum in Jakarta, Prambanan Museum (Central Java), Sasana Budaya Museum of Jogjakarta (Central Java), Empu Tantular and Mojokerto Museum (both in Eastern Java) in Indonesia. Besides, a comprehensive survey of some areas, especially in Java and Bali, has been undertaken in quest of Ganesha images.

Since it is physically impossible to study all extant images, we have taken only some representative figures from different regions and in different media, lithic, terracotta and metal, into consideration for our study. In Indian sculpture Ganesha sometimes is shown as a subsidiary figure also. Such representations have also been considered. The data from Indonesia consist of more than a hundred images, both in stone and bronze, from various parts of that country. While collecting the data, the researcher could take photographs of a
limited number of images for obvious reasons, and sketches were possible, to illustrate the study. He had, however, to be content only with a description where he was not permitted to take the photographs.

The material has been studied in the light of the following aspects:

1. Physical proportions of the images
2. Attributes
3. Postures
4. Accessory figures
5. Composition
6. Workmanship, and
7. Style.

Now, before going into the details to discuss the subject in the following chapters, it is better if we give here some general information about Gaṇeśa and his images found in the two countries.

I. India

Gaṇeśa, also known as Gaṇapati, Vināyaka, Gajamukha, Ekadanta, Lambodara, etc., is regarded as a benign and helpful deity which brings success and assures worldly well-being. Yet, whatever success he contributes to human undertakings is understood to come in response to the honour paid to him by his devotees. If he is not worshipped, he may withdraw his support and this may cause the undertaking to fail. He is, therefore, regarded as the king of obstacles who creates and removes the obstacles, as is indicated by his name Vighnarāja, "king of
obstacles" and Vighnavināśana, "destroyer of obstacles". Besides, he is called Siddhidātā, "bestower of success" also.\textsuperscript{17}

The word Gaṅapati is found in some very early texts. The Rgveda, for instance, contains an invocatory prayer addressed to a deity named Gaṅapati: Gaṇānām tvā gaṇapatīṁ havāmahe.\textsuperscript{18} However, according to scholarly opinion, the Vedic Gaṅapati denotes Brahmaṇāspati, the leader of the group of Devas and similar other beings belonging to his own order (Gaṇānām devā digaṇānām sambandhinaṁ Gaṇapatiṁ svīyānāṁ patiṁ; Sayana). He (Brahmaṇāspati) is also to be invoked by the seer as "Gaṅapati of the Gaṇas and the most omniscient among the omniscient" (Gaṇānāṁ Gaṇapatīṁ kaviṁ kaviṁ).\textsuperscript{19}

Mānava-Gṛhya, composed in circa 4th century B.C., mentions four Vinākayas Sālakaṭaṅkaṭa, Kuśmaṇḍarājaputra, Uṣmita and Devayajana, who obstruct human activities.\textsuperscript{20} These are not regarded as elephant-headed god, but they are said to have transformed ultimately into one Vināyaka-Gaṅapati.\textsuperscript{21}

The accepted opinion so far is that the cult of Gaṅeṣa appeared sometime in the late Gupta period.\textsuperscript{22} By the tenth century, the god was worshipped by an independent sect known as Gaṅapatya, by whom the god was looked upon as supreme, and believed to be superior to Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.\textsuperscript{23} The sect came to have as many as six subdivisions, worshipping respectively Mahā-Gaṅapati, Haridrā-Gaṅapati, Ucchiṣṭa-Gaṅapati, Navanīta-Gaṅapati and Saṃtāna-Gaṅapati.\textsuperscript{24}

The god was also adopted in Buddhism\textsuperscript{25} and Jainism.\textsuperscript{26} In Buddhism, too, the god is represented in various forms.
Sometime, he is held in high esteem, but sometime with hatred trodden by Buddhist god of obstacles. Gaṇeśa was amalgamated so deeply in Buddhism that, similar to Hinduism, he was also worshipped in the very beginning of Buddhist rituals. Some Buddhist temple contain images of Gaṇeśa, as for example, the Tabo monastery, Himachal Pradesh.

Gaṇeśa seems to have been included in the Jain pantheon during circa 7th-12th century A.D. He is depicted on the door surrounds and walls of the small Devakulikas in the Mahavira temple complex at Osian and many other sites. However, he is depicted in Jainism just as in Hinduism.

The mode of worshipping Gaṇeśa finds mention in the various Upapurāṇas and the Gaṇeśagītā. It reveals to us that mental worship (mānasī pūjā) is the best to worship the god. Hatred of other gods is derided in strong terms. Besides, two other ways of worshipping the god are also mentioned. The first, he is regarded as identical with the supreme spirit, the Paramātmā, and is worshipped by mystical contemplation. The second way the god is adorned with flowers and other offerings (pūjā).

Many scholars believe that Gaṇeśa was originally a non-Aryan deity. His origin must have been associated with the elephant cult, for his appearance has much in common with an elephant. The rope for binding an elephant, i.e. pāśa, and the instrument for goading the animal, i.e. ṛhkuṣa, which are usually held by Gaṇeśa, are also related to elephants and their controller. The presence of elephants on the earth is very significant. This animal is believed to have human qualities
The Vessantara Jātaka tells us that white elephant brings rains, fertility and riches to a country. The owning of elephant was a prerogative of kings. Elephants were hunted and captured in the wilderness and then kept on forest reserves, or in garrisons, for the purposes of warfare, or were assigned to the royal stables, to serve as mounts of state and for purpose of magic. R.P. Yadava is of the opinion that the worship of elephant paved the way to the rise of Gaṇeśa.

Gaṇeśa and Kubera have many features in common. Therefore, his origin is also related to the yakṣas whose everlord is Kubera. In the Matsya Purāṇa (260, 52-55), Gaṇeśa is described as possessing Ṛddhi. This is similar to Kubera who is stated to be united with Ṛddhi in the Rāmāyana (VII, 15,17). They are both represented as grotesque in appearance and potbellied. This sort of potbelly (tundila) resembles a pitcher, "containing all prosperity (ṛddhi)", fulfilling all the desires. Coomaraswamy has noted the similarities saying that "Gaṇeśa is undoubtedly a yakṣa type by his big belly and perhaps actually equivalent to Kubera or Manibhadra".

Moreover in sculptural art, Gaṇeśa and Kubera often figure together flanking Mahiṣamardinī, Chaṇḍikā, Lakṣmī, etc., in some panels or temples.

The association of Gaṇeśa and Kubera with Lakṣmī, is not without significance. Lakṣmī is the goddess of wealth, prosperity and success. Similar is the case with Gaṇeśa and Kubera as mentioned above. Perhaps that is why the sculptor selected Gaṇeśa and Kubera to flank the goddess. With
reference to a Kuśāṇa sculpture of Lakṣmī being flanked by Gaṇeśa and Kubera preserved in the Mathura Museum, Dhavalikar has noticed that the artist was unconsciously elevating Gaṇeśa, who was an obstacle-creator, to the level of a divinity, ranking him with Gajalakṣmī and Kubera in importance. He infers further that both Kubera and Gaṇeśa were yakṣa first but the former remained a yakṣa whereas the latter attained divine status.  

Apart from his association with Kubera or others as mentioned above, Gaṇeśa has, iconographically, various number of hands, from two to sixteen, invariably holding the bowl of sweet balls and his own broken tusk, battle axe, rosary, radish, pomegranate, noose, elephant-goad etc. He may be represented as sitting, standing, dancing, riding his vehicle astride, etc.

In his aspect of a vāmācāra or tāntrika (he is, in this aspect, well-known as Unmattā-Ucchiṣṭa Gaṇapati), he is represented as having three eyes, kissing with his trunk his Śakti who is seated on his left lap, and three of his four hands holding pāśa, ahkuṣa, and gadā respectively and one hand in abhaya-mudrā.

Female aspect of Gaṇeśa is called Vināyakī, Vighneśvarī, Gaṇeśānī, Ganeśvarī, etc. This goddess may have been conceived when Gaṇeśa became a major deity. Like Gaṇeśa, she is also elephant-headed, potbellied, and holding a bowl with sweet balls, paraśu, aṅkuṣa, mūlaka, etc. (Pl. I). Besides elephant-headed Śakti, Gaṇeśa also has a human-faced Śakti. The latter is probably the embodiment of Siddhi or Buddhi.
How Gaṇeśa came to have elephant-head is referred to in several Purāṇas. Every Purāṇa, however, gives a different account. Principally, however, they reveal that the god was human-faced originally, then beheaded and replaced with an elephant head. Courtright suggests that the beheading represents a significant ritual so that Gaṇeśa who was originally non-Aryan deity, acquires his divine status, or attains his admission to the Brahmanical pantheon.

Gaṇeśa cult is so popular but independent temples dedicated to him are rare. One temple is referred to in a pillar inscription at Velpuru. The temple is, however, no longer extant. But it is supposed to be located at Peddavegi (Andhradesa). Another one is the rock-cut temple near Trichinopoly known as Ucchipillaiya Kovil.

As a niche or panel figure, the god may occupy the maṇḍovara-rathikā, jagatī-rathikā, lalāṭa-bimba, udumbara, udgama-rathikās etc. of a temple. Remarkable it is to mention that the starting point of circumbulation is very common place for the god. This corresponds to the Gaṇeśa's right of being worshipped before the worship of all other gods. Similarly, the god often figures along with Kārttikeya and Maḥiṣamardini, and occupies the rāhā section of Jāṅghā of a temple respectively.

Regarding the antiquity of Gaṇeśa sculptures, one silver drachm of Hermaeus, an Indo-Greek king, dated to the early first century B.C., preserved in the British Museum, is remarkable for it bears a disputed figure of Gaṇeśa. The discovery of the Gaṇeśa figure on this coin was reported by A.K. Naraṇin. On this coin the usual figure of Zeus (as is
shown in Narain's photograph) is seen with an elephant's trunk curved to left, so that Narain thinks that the most ancient representation of Gañeśa dates back to the period of the above mentioned coin. Joe Cribb, however, disagrees with Narain's suggestion. He contends that the trunk of the image shown in Narain's photograph is only an illusion due to the lighting effect given to the coin while photographing. In support of his argument, Cribb shows his photographs of the same coin but from different angles. The image here appears with what look like the trunk. Hence, Narain's suggestion is doubtful.

Sivaramamurti is of the opinion that the earliest representation of Gañeśa occurred on the coping of the Buddhist stupa at Amaravati (the figure, however, represent a gana) datable to the beginning of the Sātavāhana period in the 2nd century B.C. (Some scholars, however, place the beginning of the Sātavāhana rule in the middle of the first century B.C.).

It is remarkable that a stone-slab of Kuśāṇa period discovered from Mathura, represents five elephant-faced Gajânana Yakṣas. This might have played an important part in the development of the concept of Pañca-Gañeśa icons, examples of which have been found from different places like Badoha (dist. Vidisa, M.P.), Kadavaha (dist. Guna), Kiradu (Rajasthan), Jamaroli (near Jaipur, Rajasthan) and Varanasi.

In the Mathura museum are preserved some sculptures of the god which are regarded as the creation of the Kuśāṇa period. During the Kuśāṇa period, the god was depicted as
nude and devoid of ornaments, with a realistic elephant-head. Even in a sculpture from Udayagiri belonging to the early Gupta period, the god appears to be quite similar to the Kuśāṇa examples. At Nachna, Bhumara, Bhitargaon, and Deogarh, however, Gaṇeśa appears in slightly developed form.

The discovery of Gaṇeśa image at Sakar Dar in Kabul, assigned to the middle 4th century A.D. on the basis of its iconographical peculiarities has thrown significant light on the worship and popularity of Gaṇeśa not only in India but beyond its frontiers in the early Gupta period.

II. Indonesia

The deity is popular not only in India, but in Indonesia also. The discovery of numerous images of Gaṇeśa indicates that his cult was very strong in Indonesia during the classical and post-classical period (i.e. 8th-15th century A.D.). However, there is no Indonesian legend narrating how the god became elephant-headed. We have noted above the Indian tradition that originally the god had a human face before he was beheaded mistakenly by Śiva.

The old Javanese manuscript called Smaradahana, the only text of Indonesian narrating Gaṇeśa's birth tells us that Gaṇeśa was born having elephant-head originally. The legend goes like this. When Umā was in pregnancy, other gods who came to pay Umā a visit, brought with them Indra's elephant, an animal of terrifying appearance. At the sight of it Umā was awfully frightened. So much was the impact of the sight of Airāvata, Indra's elephant, that when she gave birth to a
child, it appeared to have a head like that of an elephant. Śiva declared its name Sang Hyang Gaṇa, who will be the remover of obstacles and destroyer of the enemies of the gods.

How the god is treated as the remover of obstacles, tradition surviving in Bali may explain, for the name of the god still appears in the ceremony called rsigana, which is performed whenever a disaster like floods, mountain eruption, earthquakes etc. occur in the region. It is worth noting that in this ceremony Gaṇeṣa must be present, not in the form of an image but as a motif on a white flag. The pole of the flag must be made of a yellow bamboo. The white flag with Gaṇeṣa motif is also used in the ceremony called nangluk-merana, which is regularly performed twice a year, for killing plant diseases.

Another tradition coming from Bali is that in few cases, the god is worshipped by those whose profession is witchcraft. In this case, the god is regarded as the curer of illness. There is, however, no Indonesian text which associate Gaṇeṣa with witchcraft. But a legend from India associates the god with the cure of physical diseases. The legend tells about Somakaṇṭha, the king of Devanagara, who in his previous life was a reckless vaiśya and had killed Brahmins. Then in his old age he had become penitent and desired to give away his ill-gotten wealth to the Brahmins. But they all refused to accept it. So, instead he spent his fortune for refurbishing an abandoned temple of Gaṇeṣa and died soon after. Allowed by Yama to reap the reward from this pious act, he was reborn as the righteous king Somakaṇṭha, but finally the retribution for
his earlier Brahmanicide caught up with him in the form of leprosy and the wild bird started devouring his flesh. But Bhṛgu cured the king by sprinkling water on him while reciting one hundred and eight names of Gaṇeśa and sent his evil nature out of his body.67

The mode of worshipping Gaṇeśa in India and Indonesia, too, has got similarities. The devotees bow to the god and make use of flowers in worship. It is mentioned in the Bhāratayuddha, an old Javanese text dated 12th century A.D., that Hastināpura palace had an image of Gaṇeśa covered with flowers.68

Gaṇeśa worship is also corroborated by a hymn dedicated to him, when Hindu Balinese priests make holy water. The hymn goes like this

Om namostu te Gaṇapati
Sarvavighna vināśanam
Sarva kārya prasiddhatam
Mama kārya prasiddhantu
Vinayakam Gaṇapati
Sarvakleśa vināśanam
Mahāsakti karam nityam
Tvam mami varampradam .69

The iconic form and physical features of the god, in some cases have much in common with those from India. He is shown as having corpulent body and potbelly, and, of course, the god is also elephant-headed. The attributes held by the god are commonly a bowl, broken tusk, rosary and battle axe. It is, however, to be noted that in India the bowl is invariably shown with sweet-balls whereas it is empty in Indonesia. In a few cases in Indonesian sculpture, the god is
also seen to have other attributes like pāśa, padma, śaṅka etc.

In Indonesia all images of Gaṇeśa are four handed. But the number of hands in India may be two, four, eight, ten and even more. In the former country most of the images of the deity are shown as sitting and a few as standing, but in the latter country we have seated, standing and even dancing types.

The tāntrika form of Gaṇeśa images from Indonesia is characterised by skull ornaments adorning the god lavishly. Even the pedestal has been bedecked with such ornamentation. The usage of the ornamentation is regarded due to Gaṇeśa's relationship with Śiva who, too, wears a garland of skulls in some of his forms. But we observe many other deities or portraits of royal family, for example the images of Cāmuṇḍā, Narasiṁha and Ādityavarman figure with skull-ornaments. Necessary to note is that skull ornamentations in Indonesia is indicative of the tāntrika nature of a god.

As to the placement of the god, he is supposed to occupy the confluences of the rivers, river-crossings, cross-roads and other vulnerable spots, besides his permanent place at the rear of a Śaivite temple.

Tantu Panggalan, an old Javanese text dated 15th century A.D., places the god at the eastern side of the Mount Mahāmeru, while the northern and southern side are respectively occupied by Durgā and Agastya, and the western side by two semi-gods; Kāla and Anungkāla.

In East Javanese temples, Gaṇeśa always occupies the eastern side or the rear side of a temple, as the temples
always face toward west. In central Javanese temples, too, the god occupies the rear side of a temple. It is, thus, the same principle as occurred in East Javanese temples. The only difference is that the rear side of the Central Javanese temples is in the west as the temples face toward east. So, unlike India, the god is never represented on the lintel of a shrine or at the starting point of circumbulation etc. He is shown at the rear side of the shrines.

We thus see that the form of the deity, his mode of worship, his placement in the temples in the two countries show both similarities as well as some differences. These similarities and differences are elaborated and analyzed in the ensuing chapters.
Notes and References


2. Some representations of the deity from Central Asia are regarded to be of Varāha by Chandrasekhar Gupta, who observes, "This cult appears to have been more popular in Central Asia after 4th cent. A.D. where several paintings showing Varāha and Śiva holding Sun and Moon have been found. But unfortunately these figures of Varāha are described as Ganeśa". (See Pr. Pb• p. 236).

3. Getty has studied Ganeśa in Indian and outside of the country. Her monumental work (see GAE) consists of seven chapters. The first three chapters deal with Indian Ganeśa. The rest of the chapters deal with Ganeśa outside India, i.e., Japan, China, Nepal, and South East Asia.


9. Dhavalikar has written several papers on Ganeśa. One of them has been mentioned above (see note no. 1). Two other

10. GNS.

11. Banerji, Arundhati, "Iconography of Two Armed Ganesa", Roopalekha, Vol. LV, Nos. 1 & 2, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 21-40. She contends that two-armed figures of Ganeśa are of a subsidiary deity whose presence in temple is intended to depict him as a vighnanāśaka or a siddhidātā.

12. Sedyawati, Edi., Pengarcaan Ganeśa Masa Kadiri dan Siṅhasāri, Sebuah Tinjauan Sejarah Kesenian, translation as (Ganeśa images from Kadiri and Siṅhasāri period, a survey on historical art), Ph. D thesis, Universitas Indonesia, 1985. In this study, the mentioned scholar has pointed out some elements of the images which distinguish those of Kadiri from Siṅhasāri besides those of Central Java from East Java.

13. Ganeśa has been referred to by many scholars. Prominent among them are Banerjea, J.N. DHI, New Delhi, 1985 (rpt.); Bhandarkar, VSMRS, Poona, 1929; Sampurnanand, Evolution of the Hindu Pantheon, Bombay, 1963.


17. DHI, p. 355.

18. Ibid., p. 356.

19. Ibid., p. 575.
20. VSMRS, pp. 210 ff.


27. Yadava, op.cit., p. 482.


29. Handa, op.cit., pp. 50, 115; Pl. 23.

30. Tiwary, op.cit., p. 44.


32. Goyal, op.cit., p. 357.

33. Sampurnanand, op.cit., p. 56.


35. Yadava, op.cit., p. 484.


37. Yadava, loc.cit.

38. Goyal, op.cit., p. 351.


45. BINI, p. 135.

46. GNS, pp. 92 ff.


49. GAE, p. 7.


51. BHJ, pp. 210, 425.

52. *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 27.104.


55. Cribb, *loc.cit*.

56. AIA, p. 82.


60. Parekh, *loc.cit*.


62. AIA, p. 82.

64. This text uses the old Javanese language. It has been translated into Indonesian by Edi Sedyawati (see Sedyawati ed., op. cit., pp. 231-259).


66. Ibid.

67. Garuda Purana 1.2.10, quoted from Courtright, GNS., p. 145.


69. Phalgunadi, Evolution of Hindu Culture in Bali (From the earliest period to the present time), Delhi, 1991, p. 102.

70. GAE, p. 57; Dhavalikar (1970), p. 12.


72. Satyawati Suleiman, Monuments of Ancient Indonesia, Pusat Penelitian Purbakala dan Peninggalan sejarah Nasional, 1976, Pl. 9.68.

73. Sarkar, Amal, op. cit., p. 85.
