

## Three Early Sculptures<sup>1</sup> in Stone from The National Museum, Kathmandu

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### A. Yaksha-Bodhisattva Figure From Hadigaon, Kathmandu

A stone figure, fully carved in the round on coarse sandstone of buff colour (pl.V) is displayed in the open air in the premises of the National Museum at Kathmandu. Though fuller details are not readily available, it is stated to have been found in Hadigaon, a thickly inhabited locality in the north-eastern part of Kathmandu. This area has yielded many inscriptions of the Lichchhavis, and considerable deposits of ancient occupation seem to lie under the present habitation.

The torso, in its extant condition, measures 3 ft. 1½ in. in height and 1 ft. 6½ in. in width. The head as well as the feet are broken and not available for study. The figure stands in *śamabhaṅga* and carries broad shoulders upon comparatively slender thighs and feet. The figure wears a *dhōṭī*, almost diaphanous in character in front but for the indication of the frontal folds, flowing down between the thighs and legs and held in position by means of a girdle (*mekhala*) tied into a knot a little to the right of the central folds. At the rear the *dhōṭī* follows the outline of the limbs, including the seat and is marked decoratively by obliquely incised grooves in groups of two, three or four. The end (*kachchha*) that goes between the legs and comes up at the rear is marked by four folds and tucked neatly into the upper edge of the *dhōṭī*. The waist band is also marked decoratively by criss-cross grooves between two longitudinal grooves at the two edges.

The *uttariya* draped over the left shoulder as an *ekamsika* runs diagonally across the back and under the right arm, and the surplus part seems apparently to be supported by the left as in the style of the colossal figure of the Bodhisattva from Sarnath dedicated by Friar Bala, or the colossal figure of Bodhisattva at the Mathura Museum. That the drapery of the *uttariya* in folds was supported on the left hand is also indicated by a vertical end sticking out at the rear.

The left hand with the fist closed and the thumb pointing upward is held against the waist, a little to the fore, as in the style of the Bodhisattva figures from Mathura and Sarnath etc., marking a difference from the Yaksha figures of still earlier date.

The only ornament the figure wears is a *hara*, broken at the front, but with its ends tied at the rear by a neatly made knot with its plaited ends resting against the back. This feature is not entirely absent from the Bodhisattva figure, though the Friar Bala figure from Sarnath, or the Bodhisattva figures from Katra and Anyor (in the Mathura Museum), do not sport any *hara*, and these instead have a deep groove around the neck. It should be noted, however, that the *hara* forms an invariable aspect of the Yaksha or Yakshi figures. Nevertheless, the high relief figures of Bodhisattva in Mathura, Lucknow or Philadelphia, of the same period as

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1. We are grateful to Shri War Krishna Shrestha, Museologist, National Museum, Nepal, for allowing the sculptures described below to be photographed and for information about their findspot etc.

the Sarnath Bodhisattva, are endowed with a neck ornament which either assumes the shape of a V on the chest or is arched as is normal.

The body of the figure is quite stout and sturdy but is more proportionate than the flabby pot-bellied figures of the Yakshas, or even of the colossal Bodhisattva. But the sparsely prevalent style of wearing the *dhoti* (and also the *saree*) below the navel is anticipated in this figure with a graceful ease.

The distinctive features that mark out Yaksha figures in general are a rotund body with a chubby face, turbaned head, disc-shaped heavy ear-ornaments, a bejewelled *hara* (often more than one), sometimes V shaped, or many-stranded with multiple tasselled ends resting over the back, armlets, a flabby protruding belly, sometimes an *uttariya*, incipiently delineated, going over the left shoulder diagonally across the body (cf. the 2nd century B.C. Yaksha in the Patna Museum), but not spilling over the left arm or resting on the hand as in the case of the Bodhisattva, a lower garment (*dhoti*) reaching at its maximum up to the ankle joint, with pleats of decorative folds between the legs in front, a waist band holding the *dhoti* in its place with its loose ends dangling in the centre and not on the sides as in the case of the Bodhisattvas. Basically, however, the *samabhanga* stance, colossal aspect, *dhoti*, *uttariya*, and the waist band are common to both. As deities both may hold the *amrita patra* in the left hand, and bestow *abhaya* with the other. The Bodhisattvas additionally have an *ushnisha* over the head. Regardless of the close similarities, which have led to the conclusion that the figures of the Bodhisattvas are evolved out of the Yakshas, there are characteristic differences which mark out the former, registering a progress in the quality of sculpturing and elegance of the resultant creation.

The sculpture under consideration is singularly unique in Nepal, being the only specimen of the complex of Yaksha-Bodhisattva figures

so far known. Enough has been said above to indicate its divergence, however slight or insignificant, from the basic Yaksha type, and its proclivity towards the Bodhisattva. The absence of the head, as of the hands and feet, makes it, however, difficult to be categorical as to its exact typological or sectarian affinity. The presence of the *hara* in particular, and the style of tying the *kanthahara* at the rear would plead for its assignment to an intermediate phase in chronology between the Yaksha and Bodhisattva types.

It is difficult indeed in the present stage of our knowledge to account for its presence in Nepal, especially because of its antecedents as also of the existence of a yawning gap in style and chronological affiliation between it and the earliest dated sculptural piece known.

### B. A Rare Image from Nakshal, Kathmandu

A unique sculptural fragment (pl. VI A & B) of sandstone, in the form of a *kumbha* surmounted by a large single head backed by what appears to be the hoods of a *naga* in the shape of a fan, had been found near the Char Dhunga in the middle of the main street at Nakshal and later removed to the National Museum, where it is now displayed in the open air. It measures 2 ft. 1 in. in height. The anthropomorphic face is much damaged. The upper part of the head is entirely gone. The tip of the long and high nose has been damaged. The left eye is also damaged, but the right eye is indicated by an incised outline. The most peculiar feature of the face is the pair of ear-ornaments in the shape of knobbed wheels of a chariot. The right hand protruding from the flanged and everted rim of the *kumbha* (pitcher) is holding a jewel (*mani*), but the object in the left hand is damaged, and it may be surmised that it is a rosary of beads (*akshamala*).

As to its identification, no conclusive inference can be drawn in the absence of the essential features of identification. Several possibilities are, therefore, considered below. As figures of Agastya, who is also known as *Kumbhayoni*, are rare, it would indeed be farfetched to identify him with Agastya, particularly as the association of snake hoods would preclude such a conception.

Taking the nimbus to be made of the heads of a *naga* such a combination could well apply to Vishnu, who either reclines or sits on a seat made of the coils of Ananta Naga. The presence of the *chakra* in the ears, and of the *mani* in the right hand would point to the plausibility of such an identification.

The absence, however, of any typical aspect of the attributes of Siva, except the possible *akshamala* in the left hand, would preclude also such an identification with Siva.

The piece may, however, with some semblance of plausibility be attempted to be identified with a *Naga*. The survival of the cult of *Naga* worship in the form of the *Naga Panchami* festival in the month of *Sravana* would lend some support to the idea. It is well known that *Nagas* are delineated both zoomorphically as well as anthropomorphically. In the latter case, the lower part of the body often remains embedded in the waters of the lower region, and the upper part shown as a human figure backed by the outspread hoods of the *naga* is left exposed. This is done, as has been thought, to indicate and emphasize the dual aspects of the *Naga* cult. It is however interesting to note that the *Vishnudharmottara* prescribes the *Naga* (*Ananta*) figure to be carved with four hands, carrying a lotus and a pestle in the right, and a ploughshare and conch shell in the left, recalling *Balarama*, who was an incarnation of *Ananta* who is after all

identified or associated with Vishnu himself. Hemadri, quoting from *Mayasamhita*, prescribed two tongues, seven hoods with jewels, and *akshasutras* held in the hands with a curling tail for the *Naga* figure.

In the present instance seven hoods can be accommodated in the nimbus. The *mani* can be traced in the right hand, and the *akshasutra* in the left hand. The tail is perhaps replaced by the *kumbha* or pot, as the figure was probably intended for worship in a duly installed shrine and the *kumbha*-shaped vase easily lent itself to a firm installation. The probability of this an identification of the piece is merely suggested in the absence of corroborative evidence and not at all emphasized.

If on the contrary the circle or nimbus were to represent a lotus, the sculpture might point to different directions in regard to identification.

As to the date, we are again in difficulties. The dimmed features of the face are the only evidence to go by. The chubby face, with well-proportioned form or outlines, the thick lips, and the sculpturing in the round would indicate considerable progress in sculptural art from the rudimentary stages of early endeavours. The absence of antecedents or parallel examples in Nepal or elsewhere complicates the task. To hazard a date with any expectation of near-accuracy would be braving a risk. Nevertheless, we would assign this piece tentatively to an intermediate stage in chronology between the *Yaksha-Bodhisattva* figure described above and the earliest dated (A.D.467) sculptural panel of Vishnu *Vikranta* from *Lajimpat*, in view of its developmental form.

### C. Uma-Mahesvara at Siku Bahi (Patan)

The recent discovery<sup>1</sup> of an inscribed sculptural panel of *Uma-Mahesvara* in sand-

1. It was discovered on the 12th July 1968 by Shri B.K. Rijal. It has been noticed in the *Gorkha Patra* of the 27th July (Sravana 12, 2025 V.S.).

stone at Lalitpur (Patan) has lent further support to the view tentatively set forth in the first number of this journal about the early evolution of the cult and image of the twin deities in Nepal.<sup>1</sup> The panel is standing to the right (east) of the road leading from Lalitpur to the bridge across the Bagmati at Sankhamula, in the locality known as Siku Bahi. It is situated about 150 yards to the south of the Sankhamula Ghat, 300 yards to west of the Jagat Narayana temple, and a little to the north of the Chamunda temple.

The stele with the figures carved on its face in nearly full relief is damaged at the top and the broken outline of the panel has been made up with cement and lime to provide a conical backdrop. The extant portion of the panel measures 2 ft. 6 in. in length and 2 ft. 3 in. in height. The stone employed is yellowish grey in colour and is marked sparsely by reddish spots (pl. VII A).

The sculpture is further distinguished by the inscription engraved on the pedestal, which is part and parcel of the carved slab. Only the topmost line of the seven-lined Purva-Lichchavi inscription was first noticed, and the remaining six lines were exposed to view by the excavation of the base. The inscription is dated in the year 495 which works out to A.D. 573.

It thus represents the earliest inscribed image of Uma-Mahesvara so far known in Nepal.

The earliest inscribed and dated image in Nepal is the Lajimpat panel of Vishnu-Vaikrantamurti<sup>2</sup> dated to the year 389 working out to A.D. 467.

The inscription recently found at Siku Bahi (pls. VII B & VIII) is damaged at several places. Nevertheless it is possible to read it satisfactorily.<sup>3</sup>

It refers in the third line to the installation (*sthapita*) of earthen (clay or terracotta) images of the Mothers by some one of an unknown *gotra*, their damage in course of time and about thoughts of restoration and repairs in the fourth line (*pratisamskarakriya chintita*) by Babhruvarma, and to the making of a stony (*sailyah*) image, in the last line, by Desa Bhattarika, mother of the nephew, Desavarma, of Babhruvarma. It is clear therefore that the earlier clay or terracotta image with or without the shrine ever it underwent some damage after its primary installation, necessitating a later repair, or restoration of the image or construction of the shrine in stone.

The time-lag between the two events could not have been more than 25 years, as it happened in the lifetime of Desavarma, nephew (*bhratusputra*) of Babhruvarma,<sup>4</sup> after the latter had expired (*tasyaiva kalagatsya*).

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1. N.R. Banerjee, 'A Note on the Iconography of Uma-Mahesvara in Nepal', *Ancient Nepal*, No. 1.
  2. This panel was housed for a long time in the central hall of the Bir-Pustakalaya (Trichandra College Building), Kathmandu. But it has recently been shifted to the National Museum at Kathmandu, where it may be seen. A later replica of it, but carrying the identical inscription and date, is even now standing in the midst of a field at Tilganga on the eastern bank of the Bagmati, opposite the Pasupati temple at Deo Patan.
  3. As the matter was going to press, the text of the inscription with a translation in Nepali was published by the *Purnima*, Vol.17, pp.76-79. The photograph of the estampage, as made by Shri Hem Raj Sakya Epigraphist of the Department, is being published here for the convenience of readers. The prior publication in the *Purnima* makes it helpful to all concerned.
  4. Several diversely damaged inscriptions of Ganadeva have been found earlier. But the one at Balambu of the year 482, mentions a person as 'Ba-Varma', serving as the messenger (*duṭaka*) as published in *Purnima*, Vol. 10, p.4. It can now perhaps be conceded that the *duṭaka* Ba-Varma of the Balambu inscription may well have been Babhruvarma and identifiable with Babhruvarma of the Siku Bahi inscription. If so, Babhruvarma of the Siku Bahi inscription would have held a highly respectable and powerful position in the governmental hierarchy. It would also indicate that Babhruvarma was alive in the year 482, but dead before the year 495.

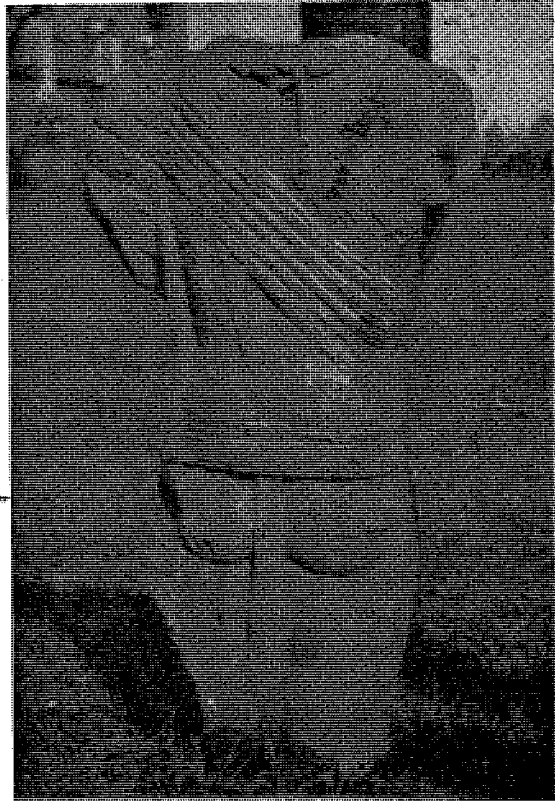


A. Stone figure of Yaksha-Bodhisattva (National Museum, Nepal). See pages 37 & 38.

क. यक्ष-बोधिसत्त्वको मूर्ति (राष्ट्रिय संग्रहालय, नेपाल)।  
पृष्ठ ३७ र ३८ ।

B. Rear view of Yaksha-Bodhisattva (National Museum, Nepal). See Pages 37 & 38.

ख. यक्ष-बोधिसत्त्वको मूर्ति (राष्ट्रिय संग्रहालय, नेपाल)  
पृष्ठ ३७ र ३८ ।





A. Naga (?) on *ghata* (National Museum, Nepal).  
See pages 38 & 39.

क. पूर्णकलशमा नागमूर्ति ? (राष्ट्रिय संग्रहालय, नेपाल) ।  
पृष्ठ ३८ र ३९ ।

B. Naga (?) on *ghata* (National Museum,  
Nepal), near view. See, pages. 38 & 39.

ख. पूर्णकलशमा नागमूर्ति (?) (राष्ट्रिय संग्रहालय, नेपाल)  
पृष्ठ ३८ र ३९ ।





A. Uma- Mahesvara Stone panel in Siku Bahi, Lalitpur. See pages 39 & 34.

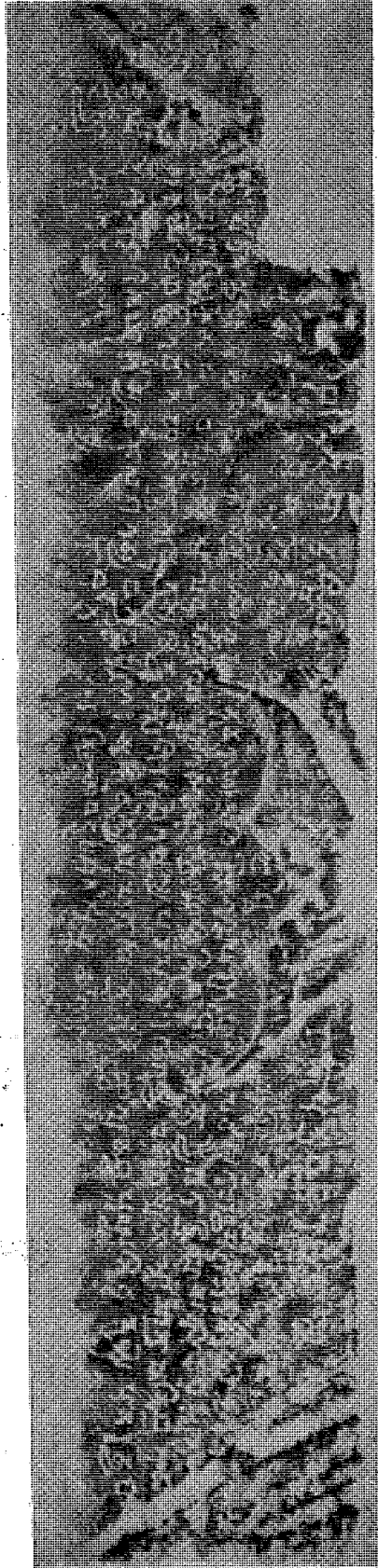
क. सिकुबहीमा उमा- महेश्वरको शिलामूर्ति । पृष्ठ ३९ र ३४ ।



B. The inscribed pedestal of the Uma- Mahesvara panel at Siku Bahi, Lalitpur. See pages 40 & 34.

ख. उमामहेश्वर मूर्तिको पादपीठमा रहेको अभिलेख (सिकुबही, ललितपुर) । पृष्ठ ४० र ३४ ।

Estampage of the inscription on the pedestal of Uma-Mahesvara panel at Siku Bahi, Lalitpur. See pages 40 & 43.  
उमामहेश्वरका पादपीठमा रहेको अभिलेखको प्रतिलिपि । पृष्ठ ४०-४३ ।





At the earliest, therefore, the older clay panel could be dated to *circa* A.D. 550, shortly before the reign of Ganadeva (560-67 A.D.)

Siva is shown in the panel as seated in *sukhasana*, in *samabhanga* (erect) posture, and is looking frontally. It is rather unfortunate that the face has been damaged. Though he should be carrying the *jatabhara*, the hedgear is to be made out, but the outlines of the eyes are easily traceable. The nose is completely damaged. Though not very distinct, probably the right ear has the *sarpa-kundala* resting over the shoulder. The face is robustly rotund as is characteristic of early sculpturing. There are at least two *kanthaharas* round the neck.

The figure is strikingly two-handed. The right arm is folded at the elbow to facilitate the holding of a *mani* in the hand before the thigh. The left elbow rests on the shoulder or back of Uma and holds a flower.

The right leg is folded at the knee and the foot is planted, rather crudely, on plain rock, in a niche especially cut to accommodate it. The left leg is folded beneath the seat. The *udarabandha* of Siva is a modern accretion, being done up wistfully in cement.

Siva wears a *dhoti*, held together at the waist by a double-lined *mekhala*.

The *medhra* is in *urddhvartea*s aspect, recalling the imagery of Kalidasa invoked in the *Malavikagnimitram*.<sup>1</sup>

This itself would be indicative of its early date and bring this piece into the same class as that of the Siva figures of the Uma-Mahesvara panel in Dugahiti at Sankhu and at Ganchanani (Lalitpur).<sup>2</sup> The *dhoti* is marked with decorative lines, as became a

common practice in the sculptures from the seventh century onwards. The beginnings of the decorative drapery can, therefore, be traced back to this image. It is not clear if Siva was provided with any *uttariya*.

It may be mentioned in passing that part of the right arm has also been done up crudely in lime-cement mortar.

The figure of Uma is to the proper left of Siva, overlapping the figure of the consort only slightly at the rear. She is decidedly in *atibhanga* posture, and is almost leaning against the left arm and knee of Siva, which gently serve as props to her supple body.

The face of Uma is completely damaged. She is sitting sideways on her haunches on the bare rock, supporting herself partially on the right hand firmly planted on the base, with the ends of her *uttariya* serving as cushion. The left arm is stretched forward and is supported upon the left knee. Being damaged, the entire length of the arm has been patched up in lime-cement mortar. The lower garment is not especially indicated, but the folds in front stretch forward along the contours of the legs. The breasts are not plump, but are realistically executed, with their proclivities following the posture of the body. As in the case of Siva, the *udarabandha* is a modern accretion.

The plumpness of the figures, the somewhat stunted hands and legs (in the case of Siva), the complete absence of the attendant figures on the sides, and presumably in the upper parts of the stele as well, the delineation of the figure of Siva with two arms, the crudeness and imbalance of the niche for Siva's right foot, and the absence of either the tiger-

1. Banerjee, *Ancient Nepal*, No. 1, p. 28.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 28; pls. X A and X B.

skin or cushion seat are ample indications of the early date of the sculpture. It is also considered that the stele at the Chamunda temple has the figure of Kumara in it, but it has practically no *prabhamandaia* whereas in this case, it was very much there though it is difficult to be categorical about the figures that may have been carved on the *prabhamandala*, since it is broken and gone. Nevertheless, the faint traces of incised designs at the rear of both Siva and Uma would probably indicate the delineation of the peacock of Kumara, though it is again a matter of surmise, which, alas, cannot be emphasized. The practice of delineating the presence of Kumara either by the Kumara figure, with or without the peacock, or merely by the peacock had been the vogue in Nepal as exemplified in several specimens, the earliest of which would go back to the sixth century (vide the Kumara-sambhava panels of Naghaltole or Bangemudha in Kathmandu).

In the order of evolution the panel at the Chamunda temple would still occupy an earlier place, as possibly the headless panel now in the premises of the Bhandarkhal to the east of Mulchowk in the Durbar Square at Lalitpur. This is inferred particularly from the emergence of decorative patterns on the lower drapery of Siva, and the general conformity of the posture of the two figures in all later specimens. It may not be out of place to mention that the *urddhvavaretas* aspect of Siva would draw it closer to the Sankhu

Dugahiti panel, as already suggested above and which has been tentatively dated to the seventh century A.D.

Thus it forms an essential link in the chain of sculptural evolution in Nepal and pin-points the beginning of a characteristic style in image making that developed in Nepal with a distinction.

With a view to anticipating and forestalling any objections that might be raised against the proposed identification of the figures as of Uma-Mahesvara in view of the absence of any unmistakable features like the *trinetra*, trident, bull (Nandi), Kumara, Ganesa, or the absence of two additional hands, it may be pointed out that the proposed identification has been made on the basis of a plausible surmise, taking into consideration the conformity of the composition to decidedly Siva-Parvati or Uma-Mahesvara images of later or earlier periods, the presence of the *sarpakundala* in the right ear of Siva, and above all of the delineation of the *urddhvavaretas* aspect of Siva.<sup>1</sup> The inscription no doubt refers to the donors as *Paramabhagavata*, as indicative of adherence to the cult of Vishnu. It is well known that the Lichchavis, during whose rule the image was installed, like their Indian contemporaries, the Guptas, were very catholic in their religious outlook and equally tolerant of other sects and cults, including the worship of Siva. Hence there would not be any bar to their patronage to Saivism,

1. As regards the identification of the figure tentatively proposed as a *Matrika* by the learned editors of the inscription we find it difficult to concede that the figure on the proper right is female, simply because of the absence of the breasts on the one hand and the presence of the *medhara* in *urddhvavaretas* position on the other. It should, therefore, be identified as Siva and Parvati (Uma-Mahesvara) together as amply indicated above.

It should be emphasized at this point that the panel as it is cannot be held as a representation of *Matrika*, because one of them is clearly a male (and Siva for that matter), in *alingana* as is permissible in the case of a wedded couple. Such a posture of *alingana* between two females, both suggesting an attitude of nestling towards each other, as in this case, is quaint and rather unknown! If this panel were to be a representation of *Matrika* though hitherto not reported from Nepal, we should concede the possibility of finding the collateral members of the composition in the neighbourhood, and of many other such specimens elsewhere.

or to Buddhism for that matter, of which we have ample evidence. This is also indicated by the appellation *Paramadharmika* in respect of Babhravarma in the fourth line, of *ntya-dharmabhiratachetaska* in respect of Desavarma in the fifth line, and *dharmistha* in respect of his mother, *Desa Bhattarika* in the sixth line, respectively.

The reference of the replacement of the damaged clay or terracotta figures by those of stone would also establish the prevalence of the older practice of erecting images in clay or terracotta. The preference for stone implied in the work would have been prompted by the desire for imparting a longer duration to the images. This would also presuppose the existence of a flourishing art of modelling in clay side by side with carving in stone till at least the end of the 6th century A.D., and it is indeed a pity that the older image installed at the confluence of the Bagmati and Manimati as stated in the inscription (second line) or the others, in view of the plural form of मातृणां, both of stone as well as terracotta (or clay), have not yet been found!

An examination of the Silpa Sastra texts does not support identification of the figures with any known form of मातृका, particularly in combination with the consort. It conforms, on the contrary more to the general style of the Uma-Mahesvara images (to an extent) including the आलिङ्गन and उमासहित forms as indicated in the विष्णुधर्मोत्तर, शिल्परत्न and अंशुभेदागम, respectively, quoted below, regardless of the fact that the last two are southern texts of much later date than the sculpture in question.

Excerpts from the relevant parts of the texts mentioned above are quoted below, and their significance is clear in each case.

### उमामहेश्वरमूर्तिः

युग्मं स्त्रीपुरुषं कार्यमुमेशौ दिव्यरूपिणौ ।  
द्विपाणि द्विभुजां देवीं सुमध्यां सुपयोधराम् ।  
वामपाणि तु देवस्य देव्याः स्कन्धे नियोजयेत् ॥

— विष्णुधर्मोत्तर पुराण

### आलिङ्गनमूर्तिः

तदेव भङ्गसंयुक्तं देवीदेवी परस्परम् ।  
देवो वरदहस्तेन देवी वै पराश्रितम् ॥

— अंशुभेदागमः

### उमासहितमूर्तिः

केवलं त्वेवमाख्यातं वामे गौरीसमायुतम् ।  
भिन्नपीठे विशेषेण तद्गौरीसहितं विदुः

— शिल्परत्नः

As regards the Matrika figures, मार्कण्डेयपुराण, which is not very far removed in point of time from the composite panel in question prescribes as follows:-

### माहेश्वरीमूर्तिः

यस्य देवस्य यद्दरुपं यथा भूषणवाहनम् ।  
तद्वदेव हि तच्छक्तिरसुरान्योद्भूमाययौ ॥

It describes माहेश्वरी in the following words:

माहेश्वरी वृषारूढा त्रिशूलवरधारिणी ।  
महाहिवलयया प्राप्ता चन्द्ररेखाविभूषणा ॥

विष्णुधर्मोत्तर describes माहेश्वरी as follows:

माहेश्वरी वृषारूढा पञ्चवक्त्रा त्रिलोचना ।  
शुक्लेन्दुभृज्जटाजूटा शुक्ला सर्वसुखप्रदा ।  
षड्भुजा वरदा दक्षे सूत्रं डमरुकं तथा ।  
शूलघण्टाभयं वामे सैव धत्ते महाभुजा ॥