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**Vighneswara: The Lord of Wisdom and Desire as Gleaned from Literature and the Images in Stone, Wood and Ivory in Salar Jung Museum**

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Museum is an institution devoted to the acquisition, conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation of objects having scientific, historical, cultural or artistic value. A museum is typically a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment. Museums connect people to knowledge and information, creativity and inspiration. The paper describes diverse collection of Indian mythological figures in the Salar Jung Museum, especially the images of *Vinayaka* (*Vigneswara* or *Ganesa*), the Lord of Remover of Obstacles, in different media describing its artistic and thematic points of view.

**Keywords:** Vighneswara, Salar Jung Museum, Museum

For decades, museums have had a significant role in portraying and preserving the landscape of culture. Museums have been one of the central social institutions for collecting, conserving, exhibiting, disseminating and providing access to society’s cultural and artistic heritage. Museums, libraries, etc. are treasure houses of intellectual property. An important civilized activity is to record and convey the inventions for the future. Museums including art museums or libraries, etc. are places, which accumulate civilized materials and record the process of advancement of civilization. Museums or archives also keep objects selected by indigenous intelligence. Various records including old writings, old records and various historical information and materials and places to maintain them are required in order to protect them from unexpected disasters. Information can be interpreted as not only written text but also pictures, sound, goods, tools, buildings and so on. Museums have collected and exhibited objects, which were important records of civilization. Objects are changing and disappearing. It is important to keep and convey them to our descendants.

Salar Jung Museum, which was named in 1951 after Salar Jung III (Nawab Mir Yousuf Ali Khan Bahadur, AD. 1889-1949), is one of the biggest Indian treasure houses of world arts with facilities for higher learning and research programmes. The diverse collection of Indian mythological figures in the Museum especially the images of *Vinayaka* (*Vigneswara* or *Ganesa*), the Lord of Remover of Obstacles; in different media deserve a mention for its artistic and thematic points of view.

The tradition of *Ganesa Pooja* is a very important festival to the Hindus on *Chaturthi*. It was so started in the modern times by Bala Gangadhara Tilak in Poona in the early 20th century AD., with a *Sankalpa* (idea) of succeeding freedom fight in the movement against the British. Now, the *Ganesa utsavas* spread to all corners of India with devotion.

*Vigneswara*, the god of Wisdom is the eldest and favourite son of *Siva* (*Mukkanti*) and *Parvati*. He is the *Vigna* Raja and Lord of *Ganas* (troops) of inferior deities, especially those attendants upon *Siva*, the Creator and the Lord of all gods including *Indra*, *Brahma* and *Vishnu* besides *Yogis*, *Munis* (Sages) and *Piṣachas*. (Demons). Hence, *Ganesa* is invariably propitiated at the beginning of any importance undertaking. He is called by several names such as *Ganesa*, *Maha Ganapati* (‘ga’ means wisdom/Buddhi, ‘na’ means ‘moksha’/Vidya and ‘pati’ is to mean ‘Adhipati’ (Lord). Hence, he is the Lord of *Vidya*...
(Learning) and Buddh (Knowledge). In the earliest known reference to him, is in the Aitareya-Brahmana (1.21). Ganapati is identified with Brahma, Brahmanaspati or Brihaspati. He is the first among the gods who is worshiped even by the Trimurtis. The followers of Vigneswara worship him with chanting of the following mantra:

"Om surpakarnaya namo namaha",

because:

He who causes and removes Obstacles.
He who withdraws or bestows Success.
He who ignores or fulfills all Desires.

Andhranama Sangrahamu reveals about seventeen names of Ganesa. He is the beloved son of two mothers (Dwai-matura, favourite is Parvati). He is the creator and remover of obstacles (Vighnaraja). He has big ears like winnowing pan (Surpakarna). He has a curved or bent trunk. He is elephant faced god (Karimukha/Gajanana/Gajavadana). He will remove the obstacles for those who worship him. Garika and patras (grass and leaves) are sacred for his pooja. He has a protuberant belly. He loves eating laddu/modaka (Pillari kudumulu) and coconut (Mukkanti pandu). He rides a mushika (mouse). He is dwarf (Quijuvelupu) and single tusked (Ontikommu).

There are a few legends on the birth of Vigneswara. One legend as per Matsya/Siva Purana is that he sprang from the dirt/ scurf (nalugupindi) of Parvati’s body. As a faithful attendant to Parvati, Ganesa lost his life when Siva killed with trisula on disallowing him from the entrance to get inside the inner compartments of Parvati. On the request of Parvati, Siva brought back the life of Vigneswara by attaching the head of an elephant. The elephant head attached to Vigneswara is said to be of Gajasura, who was killed by Siva. From then Vinayaka is also called Gajanana or Gajamukhudu. In another version Siva, when gods requested him to protect from the fights of Asuras and Rakshasas, to create obstacles in the way of them, created a person from his amsa (a part of his power), which was delivered out of the womb of Parvati. Him Siva named Vighneswara, and advised him to hinder the Asuras, Rakshasas and other wicked people from performing sacrifices and other virtuous acts, but to render all assistance to the Devas and other good beings in their endeavour to perform such worshippers.

The Supsrabhedagama has a version of its own regarding the birth of Ganesa.

The worship of Vinayaka has been a tradition from Vedic age as read in a Rigvedic sloka:

“Gananantvaa Ganapatigtham Havamahe
Aanassrunvannutibhissida Sadanam”.

The pooja/festival of Mangalpradayaka Vinayaka is celebrated generally on two occasions i.e., Bhadrapada Suddha Chaturti (Navaratri Chaturtotsavalu) as Siva gave him the powers of Ganadahipatyam and Vijnadhipatyam on this day according to the Puranic version with chanting of the mantra:

“Sukhlaam Bharadharam Vishnum Sashivarnam
Chaturbhuyjyam.
Anekadantam Bhaktanam Ekadanta Mupasmahe”.

Vinayaka is first among the Mukkoti-devatas. One legend says that he is the manifestation of Siva, Brahma and Vishnu. The gods, munis etc. were successful in their wars or works on the worship of Ganesa. The first version in Ganapatyupanishattu (Atharvana Vedam) says that:

“Om namaste Ganapataye, Twameva pratyakshak tatvamashi…”

Brahma worshipped Ganesa on starting of his creation of living and non-living things. Siva worshipped Ganesa when he was fighting with Tripurasura. His mother, Parvati at the time of killing the demon king, Mahishasura, also worshipped Ganesa. Vishnu also worshipped Vignaraja. Puranas say that Krishna worshipped him as to remove obstacles in his way. The Love god Mannatha worshipped him on creation of love in the visvar (world). Adisesha captured Mahabali on the worship of Ganesa. Sanaka Sunandadi Siddhi munis worshipped Ganapati for moksha. Vyasa worshipped Ganesa for being a scribe to his oral dictation of Mahabharata in Sanskrit, which starts with ‘Om’. He is Brahmawarupa as his face represents the symbol of Om. Thus Ganesa is Brahmawarupa. Ganapatyas or worshippers of Ganesa use Ganesa-Gita. Ganesa Purana consists a special reference to the glory and greatness of Ganesa. Kshema is born to Ganesa and Buddh. Labha is said to be the son of Siddhi and Ganesa. In Sakti form the deity accompanies with Lakshmi.

Narasimha Purana reveals that Vinayaka has one, two or four tusks while Ganapatyoanishad, Sadhanamala, Silparatna and Skanda Purana tell
about ekadanta. As far as trunk is concerned, the god conceived as Vakratunda since his trunk is curved.

Ganesa has more than one tusk that’s why he is referred as anekadanta. He is also referred as ekadanta as he loses one danta. The following sloka tells that the deity is worshipped with ekadanta or anekadanta:

*Agajanana padmarkam gajanana maharnisam
Anekadantam bhaktanam ekadanta mupasmahe*

Sivapuram, Lingapuram, Skandapuram, Matsyapuram, Varaahapuram, Brahmanda-puram, Brahnavaiyakara, Vinayaka, Mudgala-puranas, etc. reveal well about the birth and importance of Vinayaka. The first one in Upapuranas is Ganesa puranam. Siddhi and Buddhhi are said to be the consorts of the Lord. He rides the mushika. He accompanies generally with the goddess of Learning, Saraswati and the goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi. According to Suprabhedagamam he also accompanies with Saptamatrikas and Navgrahas in Sthanaka posture. He has three eyes as per Agamasastras. In Mudgula Puranam he is called by twenty-two names. *Silpasarasstra* depicts thirty forms of Ganesa. He is also worshipped as deity by the followers of Buddhism and Jainism.

The *pooja* or worship of Ganesa has been a tradition in not only through out India but also in Nepal, Cambodia etc. in the East as the Hindu rulers got such places under the expansion of their territory and culture. The name Vigna Vinayaka is said to be remembered while worshipping the god as read in a Punyaha vachana:

*“Bhagavanti Vigna Vinayakaupreyataam”*. 

After *pooja*, the idols of Vighneswara made of mud are removed and immersed in the water with chanting of the mantra:

*Yajnena Yajnamayajanta Devaha.*

Ganesa has two important attributes viz. an ankusa or goad as well as pasa, of these goad is used by Mahout to control and guide the elephant. The ankusa is made to represent an eternal source of power for the ignorant. The pasa or the noose is symbolic of wisdom. This attributes in the hand of Ganesa displays the overcoming over ignorance with wisdom. The ankusa is usually held in the right hand, which tends to control the brain on the right side of the head.

The life story of Lord Ganesa has been attracted by artists, composers and the poets through the ages to record their momentous reflections in art especially, sculpture, miniatures, poetry and devotional songs and further in performing arts. Cloth paintings like Kalamkari, Oil on canvas, Glass painting, Thankas etc. also depict the figures of Ganesa.

Though Ganesa is the Vedic god, the short and elephant-headed Ganesa appears first in sculpture in the Gupta period (4th-5th century AD.). Sakti-Ganesa appears only in 6th century AD. Whom he holds on his left hip. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, the images of Ganesa in sand stone, granite, marble, basalt/ black stone, precious stone like crystal, etc. are abundantly available representing the famous dynasties such as Gupta, Pallava, Chola, Pala, Chandela, Chalukya, Kakatiya, Hoyasala, Vijayanagara, Qutb Shahi, Maratha, Nayaka, Asaf Jahl etc.

Numerous sculptures appear in temples and other places at Badami (Tandava Murti Siva with Ganesa, outside the temple), Aihole (rock cut temple), Halibedu, Hampi (20 and 30 ft. high Ganesa sculptures) etc. in Karnataka, and in Elephant caves. Further Warangal, Draksharamam, Srisailam (Dasabhuja Ganapati is seen on the temple wall), Kalahasti, Tirupati, Lepakhli, Dhakur (Veera-bhadralayam, Medak dist.) temples etc. in Andhra Pradesh. Ganesa also appears as an independent deity as seen in Kanipakam temple in Andhra Pradesh, where he is called Varasiddhi Vinayaka. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra have been producing *daru* (wood) and *danta* (ivory) *silpas* (carvings) of Ganesa in addition to stone. In Tamil version he is called by name *Pillaiyar* (Noble child).

However, a female form of the deity called Vainayaki or Vinayaki is found at Riam in Rajasthan, which is datable to 1st Century BC.-1st Century AD. The worship of this female deity has been a tradition in Jainism and Buddhism besides Hinduism and also beyond the country. People in Java, Bali, Borneo, Cambodia, Burma, Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan etc. in the far-east also worship the deity with different names. Burmese call him *Maha-Pienne*; Mongolians-Tokhhar-oun-Khaghan; Tibetans’*ogs-bdag*; Cambodians-Prah Kenes; Chinese-Kuan-shi t’ien; Japanese-Sho-ten etc.

Salar Jung Museum has about forty images of Vighneswara with different postures, in stone, metal, wood and ivory besides some figures depicted from paintings like Miniatures, Kalamkari and Thanka
ranging from 13th or 14th century to the early 20th century AD. Salar Jung Museum has organized a special exhibition on ‘Ganesa: A Symbol of Wisdom’ on Vinayaka Chaturthi, August 31st 2003. With this most the figures of Ganesa preserved in the Museum have been put on display for the benefit of visitors. Some miniatures also represent the figures of Ganesa. Select stone, wood and ivory carvings of this deity are very important for various reasons, which have been described here in detail with iconographical and sculptural details in the chronological order. However, the metal images and the figures depicted in miniature paintings on Ganesa are attempted separately.

Select Museum Sculptures

Beautiful images of Gajanana, the anthropomorphic mythological being i.e., Elephant headed-human form of the deity are seen in different media in the Museum collection. But, the sculptures attempted here are constrained to select stone, wood and ivory sculptures. Dancing posture of Ganesa is seen only in a bronze casting (M.No.72.13). The sitting and standing postures of Ganesa are represented in the following stone, wood and ivory carvings:

A) Stone sculptures (Sila-silpamu)

Black stone images represent the essence of Vishnu. There are three marble figures of Ganesa in different forms and size. The essence of Siva is represented in the Ganesa figure carved in white stone. Two crystal images of Ganesa are also preserved in the Museum. Some of the attractive stone images of Ganesa are:

A.a. Black stone

This image (M.No. 70-XLI) carved probably with the essence of Vishnu, is represented Chaturbhuja Ganesa in sitting posture as ardhaparyankasana. In his upper hands he holds ankusa and pasa whileabhayahasta and modaka in the right and left hand are represented in the lower hands. He wears karandamakuta on his head. He is decked with various ornaments like hara and bangles. He also wears yajnopavita (sacred thread). Over all the figure of Ganesa looks like a seated dwarf with trunk curved to left side, nibbling the sweet ball (modaka). This figure, which is placed on sarvatobhadra (pedestal), belongs to south India probably Tamil Nadu and is assignable to 18th Century AD. It measures 15.4×9.7 cm. In height and width respectively.

A.b. Marble images

A.b.1. M.No.389/ XLII is a marble carving representing the seated Ganesa on lotus flower. He is shown here with chaturbhuja, holding the attributes ankusa in upper hands and modaka in lower left hand. Jatamakuta is seen clearly. His trunk rests on the hood of a snake, which rounds his potbelly as nagabhanda. Ganesa wears a ‘naga yagnopavita’. He has one tusk and the second one is seen broken. Ganapati is portrayed as youth with beautiful ornamentation. The image is otherwise called ‘Taruna Ganapati’. Below his leg, the vahana, mouse is seen on the pedestal with a sweet cake. The sculpture is datable to 19th century AD, measuring h.50.0, w. 27.0 cm. It hails from North India probably Rajasthan.

A.b.2. This fourhanded Ganesa in marble is another beautifully painted image in the Museum collection bearing the M.No.22/XLII. The deity is shown young and seated in ardhaparyankasana on a rectangular pedestal with petal design. He holds an ankusa in both of his upper hands while his lower left hand holds a modaka and the right hand is shown as abhayahasta. A gold makuta (crown) is adorned on his head. He wears yellow pancha as lower dress. He wears yajnopavita (sacred thread). His left hand, which holds modaka, is carved resting on the thigh. His trunk with a liner design in gold is curved closely. The ears are shown like winnowing pan. The nipples, and the navel are clearly seen. The bottom of the pedestal is projected slightly so as to rest his right foot. Muslika, the vehicle of Ganesa is shown on the pedestal. This marble carving of Ganesa is datable to early 20th century AD and belonging to Western India probably Rajasthan. It measures 42.8 and 25.4 cm. In height and width respectively (Fig. 1).

The above two among marble figures in the Museum collection are very important which are said to have represented with the essence of Lord Siva.

A.c. Crystal image

A.c.1. M. No.87.107 is a curious miniature image of seated Ganesa, made of qartz crystal with a tinge of violet. He shown as four handed in which he holds ankusa, pasa, modaka beside abhayahasta. He wears a headgear, a hara etc. The trunk is seen turned to the right side unlike to the south Indian stone images. This cutely carved precious stone belongs to western India probably Rajasthan. It is datable to 18th century AD. It measures to a height of 7.0 × 6.5 cm (Fig. 2).
B) Woodcarvings (Daru-silpamu)

There are about four woodcarvings representing the Gajanana is sitting and standing postures. Among them the following are important ones:

B.1. A richly carved Darusilpam (woodcarving, M.No. 112/XLII) represents the young figure of seated Ganesa as ‘Chaturbhuja Ganapati’ on a rectangular pedestal with prabhambandala with a dwarapalaka on either side of it. Ganesa is seen seated in sukhasana with usual attributes in his four hands. He holds anksusa and danta in his right hands while in the left side, the dwarapalaka holds a sharp gada in his four hands. The goad, a noose of rope, a piece of ivory and a sweet cake in his four hands. The ‘Seated Ganesa’ is in sitting posture as Sukhasana Chaturbhuja Ganapati. He is represented with usual weapons ‘gadas’ in their hands. A conical dome-like carving shaped as small gopura is richly carved. Four yali-gaja figures on the two frontal pillars are seen. This woodcarving may be copy of a Tamil Nadu temple probably in Madurai area, ascribed to 19th or early 20th century AD. It measures 261 x 136.9 cm. in height and width respectively. The image of Ganesa is measured to a height of 23.0 cm.

B.3. Another woodcarving (M.No.19/XLII) is a wall plaque representing the standing Vighneswara with prabhambandala in relief work. He stands here, in sampa sithanaka with makuta. In his hands seen are anksusa, danta pasa and modaka. The right side tusk is shown broken so as to call him ekadanta. The temples of the elephant headed Ganesa are clearly seen. He wears dhoti as lower garment. He is adorned with hara, armlets, anklets, bangles and also yajnopavita and katisutra with tassels. The figure of Gajanana is carved with frontal view with its trunk turned to the left side, taking the eatable in the left hand. He wears dhoti as lower garment. He is adorned with hara, armlets, anklets, bangles and also yajnopavita and katisutra with tassels. The figure of Gajanana is carved with frontal view with its trunk turned to the left side, taking the eatable in the left hand.

The ‘Seated Ganesa’ (M.No.429/XLVI) in ivory is another fine example south Indian artwork. This fourhanded Ganesa is seen in sitting posture as ardhaparyankasana. He looks like Taruna Ganesa, as he is shown young. He holds anksusa, abhyahasta, pasa (missing) and modaka in right and left hands respectively. He is represented with karandamakuta with crescent on his head. He wears dhoti as lower garment. He is decked with ornaments like hara, bangles, anklets etc. He is adorned with necklace, bhujavalayas, nagabhandita and yajnopavita. The ivory carving is fixed to a wooden pedestal painted black. The carving is probably hailing from Madurai or Travancore in South India. It measures 10.0 cm. in height, which is datable to late 19th or early 20th century AD.

C) Ivory carving (Danta-silpamu)

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Conclusion

The Number of accomplishments of a master-craftsman is enumerated as ten materials according to a version read in a manuscript probably written by a north Indian:
‘Daru-ishta sila-lowha
Sneha-mrit-ghat-sarkara
Danta-yantra-kriyabhasa
Silpinam dasadha-kriya’

This version reveals ten materials in which artists have been working are wood, brick, stone, metal, lime (stucco), plaster, sugar, ivory (tusk), *yantra* (?) and flat drawings as in paintings. *Ganesa*, who essentially conceived as the Creator of Obstacles (*Vighnaraja*), was transformed into a deity who could bestow success, removing all the hurdles coming into the way of achieving success. Images of *Ganesa* described above are so represented in many raw materials.

Ostensibly, the popularity of *Sankatahara Ganesa* who is the Lord of Wisdom (*Buddhi*) and Desire (*Siddhi*) is considered to be a great boon-giver. So he is considerably increased to the level of becoming first among the gods. The visitors who come in droves to the Salar Jung Museum are often seen adoring *Ganapati*, the Lord of *Buddhi* and *Vidya*. The sloka mentioned below is usually chanted in worshipping *Ganapati*, who is also the *adhipati* of *Ganas*:

“*Gananam tva Ganapati hava mahe*”.

Acknowledgement
Thanks to the Salar Jung III for having collected numerous images of most of the Hindu deities in different media especially the images of Ganesa.

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