

Sculpture of Panchayan Deities of National Museum: An Illustrative Stone Work of Nepal

Lok Nath Dulal (Corresponding author)
Associate Prof. Department of Culture
TU. Padma Kanya M. Campus, Nepal
E-mail: dulalloknath@gmail.com

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Abstract

Historical evidence proves the history of sculpturing art is as old as the history of human beings. The findings of stone sculpture and other forms of art from the different prehistoric sites of Europe, Africa and Asia have strongly supported the above mentioned acquaintance. It means the tradition of sculpturing stone art has evolved from the pre-historic culture in the world. Likewise, the tradition of creating stone sculpture and other forms of stone art also existed from the pre-historic age in Nepalese society. It is justified through the findings of hand axes and other different art objects which are being displayed in the National Museum. There are some noteworthy illustrations of Nepalese stone art in different museums abroad and in Nepal as well. Out of Nepalese stone sculptures, Panchayan deities of the national museum are considered an important specimen through religious, cultural, style, skill and technological perspectives. In this stone panel the figures of Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesh and goddess have been depicted. In Nepal, there are plenty of sculptures and paintings of these gods and goddess in single and with their families as well. But such a sculpture of this kind which has been exhibited in the stone work section of the national museum is very rare. Therefore, it is claimed that the panel is one of the important sculptures of Panchayan gods of Nepal. In this article, regarding the different issues of such sculptures going to be examined.

Keywords: Panchayana Deuta, Panchayana cult, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Ganesh

1. Introduction

Shaivism, *Vaisnavism* and *Shaktism* are the main religious pantheons which are strongly rooted in Hindu society and culture. Although, within these sects, there are many religious sub-cults that seem to exist. They have been practiced from the very earliest up to present in the Indian subcontinent especially in Hindu religion. Among them the practice of *Panchadevopasana* i.e. the cult of *Panchayan* gods is known as one of the most important traditions. In the *Kusan* period, the *Panchayatana* form of worship was developed including the five divinities. In this tradition five deities such as *Surya*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Shakti* and

Ganesh or *Skandaor Kumar* are worshiped (Singh, 1980, p. 74). They represent the five elements *Vayu* (wind), *Aakash* (sky), *Prithivi* (earth) *Agni* (fire) and *Jala* (water) respectively.

For fasting and other related rituals, the *Panchopasak* follows the *Smarta* Tradition. *Panchdeva Puja* is believed to help in attaining happiness, progress and peace. Good thoughts emerge in the mind and divine energy is manifested in the body and the behavior experiences a sense of freedom by which the mind is easily directed toward *Brahmaan*. The different *devtas* are the manifestations of *Brahmaan* who is actually unthinkable, unmanifested, unlimited and without a form. *Brahmaan* can only be known by those who are free from worldly ties and have no expectations from society. It is very difficult to achieve such a state and to visualize the image of any person or a *devata* without first seeing him is all the more arduous.

In the Indian subcontinent including Nepal, the tradition of *Panchayan puja* seems very popular among the Hindu followers. From the 11th to 12th century CE the tradition of constructing sculpture of five deities and *Panchadeval* in a group came into existence in this region. Among the images of *Panchayan* deities, the stone sculpture collected and displayed in the national museum is considered a noteworthy one, which is going to be discussed in this article. It is an example of such types of sculpture which displays an excellent craftsmanship of artists. Despite all its amusing qualities this sculpture is yet to have been the subject of research and study. The researcher hopes that this paper entitled *Sculpture of Panchayan Deities of National Museum: an Illustrative Stone Work of Nepal* will address and fulfill the partial research gaps and problems regarding the issues.

2. Problem of Study

The worship of *Panchayan* cult is an important tradition in Hindu culture. This tradition has been practiced among the people of Hindu in the Indian subcontinent from the ancient period. Likewise, archeological findings suggest that this custom was also popular as the forms of *Panchayandeuta* in *Kathmandu* valley and western Nepal as well. Plenty of sculptures, paintings and temples of *Panchayandeuta* have been created during the different periods. Among them, the sculpture of the national museum is considered an important one. But, the detailed study regarding its iconographic perspective has still not been conducted properly which is the research gap of this field. Therefore, with raising the following three questions, this paper has tried to fulfill the research gaps:

- What is the *Panchayan* cult and which gods are associated within this doctrine?
- What are the iconographic features of the panel of *Panchayan* gods?
- What are the major features of stone sculpture of *Panchayan* gods of National Museum Nepal?

3. Objectives of the Study

Normally, this study has focused on fulfillment of two types of objectives i.e. simple and complex. Simple or general objectives lay on the study of worshiping tradition of *Panchayancult* whereas the specific objectives of this study are as following:

- To study about the *Panchayan* cult and the different gods associated within this doctrine;
- To explore the iconographic features of the panel of *Panchayan* gods; and
- To examine the major features of stone sculpture of *Panchayan* gods of the national museum of Nepal.

4. Methodology

This paper is based on descriptive and analytical research design. Both primary and secondary data have been used. Essential primary data and information have been collected by doing frequent surveys of National Museum in *Chhauni*. The secondary data and sources have been collected through the published and unpublished previous research work. Regarding the panel of the *Panchayan deities*, some studies carried out by different scholars can be found. No doubt, all the studies and publications concerning this panel help to provide the description and artistic appeals of the sculptures. But there is still a lack of specific research as it's the perspectives of iconographic features. Hence, realizing a strong need for the study, an effort has been made to respond to aforementioned research gaps. In this respect, this paper is expected to address the need to some extent.

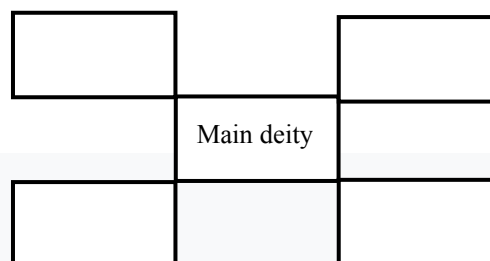
5. Findings and Analysis

During field surveys, the researcher has applied observation and interview methods for gathering primary data. What is the Panchayan cult? Which are the main deities associated within it? When did it come into existence in the Indian subcontinent and Nepal as well? These are the questions which have been addressed by searching appropriate literature. Likewise, regarding the specific study of the panel of *Panchayan* deities of the national museum, the researcher has frequently conducted field work. After collecting the data and information regarding the issues this paper has been prepared. Finally, the findings and discussion of this paper have been presented including the *Panchayan* cult, *Panchayan* cult in Nepal and the sculpture of *Panchayan* gods of the national museum in chronological order.

Panchayan Cult

Panchayan can also be addressed through the different terminologies such as *Panchayana*, *Pancayan*, *Pancayana*, *Pāñchāyan*, *Pāñchāyana*, *Pāñcāyan* or *Pāñcāyana*. The worship of *Panchayana* is practice of paying honor to the five Hindu deities such as *Surya*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Shakti* and *Ganesh* or *Skanda* or *Kumar* and any personal divinities (Flood, 1996, p. 17). It consists of the worship of five deities set in a quincunx pattern (Harle, 1994, 140). Sometimes the *Ishta Devata* is the sixth deity in the *mandala* (Gudrun, 2003, p. 60). This tradition is based on the culture of *Panchodebopashana* i.e. worshipping to the five deities (Dulal, 2061, p. 31).

In this sect the above mentioned deities worship as the representation of the five elements, such as *Agni* (fire), *Jala*(water), *Vayu* (wind), *Aakash* (sky) and *Prithivi* (earth). According to the religious texts *Devi* represents to the *Agni* (fire), *Ganesh* to the *Jala*(water), *Aaditya* or *Surya* of the *Vayu* (wind), *Vishnu* to the *Aakash* (sky) and *Shiva* represents the *Prithivi* (earth). There is another specific *puja* where deities representing the five elements of nature, earth, water, fire, air and ether are worshiped daily. This is to be performed in the morning. In this *puja* above mentioned five deities are venerated, this is called *Panchayatana puja*. In the *Mandala* five deities are presented as the following arrangement:



Arrangement of five icons in Pancayatana puja.

Panchayana puja is a system of worship in the *smartism* sect, which is one of four major religious *sampradaya* of Hinduism (Gudrun, 2003, p. 60). *Smarta* is an adjective, derived from *Smriti*, composed of written texts that were constantly revised. It was different from *Shruti* which was to be orally transmitted. The *Smarta* are the followers of *Smritis* (Rana, 2017, p. 87). Philosophically, the *Smarta* tradition emphasizes that all idols are icons of *saguna* Brahman, a means to realizing the abstract Ultimate Reality called *nirguna* Brahman. The five or six icons are seen by *Smartas* as multiple representations of the one *saguna* Brahman (i.e., a personal God with form), rather than as distinct beings. The ultimate goal in this practice is to transition past the use of icons, then follow a philosophical and meditative path to understanding the oneness of Atman (soul, self) and Brahman.

In the *Pancham Atharvasiris* of *Atharvbed*, there is a description of *Ganapati Atharvasiris*, *Shiva Atharvasiris*, *Devya Atharvasiris*, *Vishnu Atharvasiris* and *Surya Atharvasiris* (Khemaka, 1987, p.15). This indicates that the cult of worshipping *Panchayan* god has been practiced from the Vedic Period in the Indian subcontinent and its culture (Gurung, 2067, p. 233). But, Indian philosophers believe that this practice has been attributed to *Adi-Sankaracharya* in the 8th century CE in Hindu society and culture (Pandey, 1988, p. 380). During the period *Pancharatra*, *Pashupata* and *Shakta* sects were the main religious cults that seemed to popularly practice. *Sankaracharya* unified these in a single doctrine and introduced it as the *Panchayan* cult, which is also known as the *Smarta puja* system (Khatiwada, 2074, p. 652). Kane (1980, 394) also gives the credit of introducing *Panchayan* cult to *Sankarcharya*. Later on it became popular in the medieval period in India (Gudrun, 2003, p. 60).

However, archaeological evidence suggests that this practice long predates the birth of *Adi Shankar*. Many *Panchayatana mandalas* and temples have been uncovered that are from the period of Gupta Empire, and one *Panchayatana* set from the village of *Nand* (about 24 kilometers from Ajmer) has been dated to belong to the *Kushan* Empire (pre-300 CE). The *Kushan* period set includes *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Surya*, *Brahma* and one deity whose identity is unclear (Frederick, 1981, pp. 1-4).

Depending on the tradition followed by *Smarta* households, one of these deities is kept in the center and the other four corners of a square surrounding it. Either an iconic idol(s) or an iconic representation(s) or a combination for each deity is used (Gudrun, 2003, p. 60). The five may be represented as simply as five kinds of stones called a *Pancayatana puja set*, or just five marks drawn on the floor. This arrangement is also represented in *Smarta Pancayatana* temples found in India, with one central shrine, and four smaller shrines at the corners of a square (Gudrun, 2003, p. 60). According to James Harle (1994, 140-142) major Hindu temples from 1st millennium CE embed the *pancayatana* architecture very commonly, from *Odisha* to *Karnataka* to *Kashmir*; and the temples containing fusion deities such as *Harihar* (half *Shiva*, half *Vishnu*) are set in *Panchayatana* worship style.

Panchdevata is the concept of five gods in Hinduism. They are *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Ganesha*, *Shakti* and *Surya*. The concept of *Panchdevata* is more popular within Hindu communities in North India. The five gods are worshiped daily in homes. Those people who worship the five gods are known as *Panchopasak*. *Panchayatana puja* has predominantly been a tradition within Hinduism. However, the *Udasis*-a tradition that reveres the *Guru Granth Sahib* of Sikhism also worships the five *panchayatana* deities (Singh & Fenech, 2014, p. 376).

Panchayan Cult in Nepal

The concept of *Panchdeva* was developed by teachers of *Santana Dharma* to help common people who are not able to understand the concept of Brahman. The *Panchdevtas* are

manifestations of Brahman who are actually unthinkable, unmanifested, unlimited and without a form. The *Panchayan* is a group of five most popular deities worshiped in Hindu religion. During the medieval period this spiritual practice became popular and developed as a folk tradition as well as separate religious cult in India and Nepal.

The people of Western Nepal follow Hinduism and worship five deities such as *Surya*, *Vishnu*, *Siva*, *Shakti* and *Ganesh*, who are called *Panchayana*. The ancient temples of Western Nepal mostly stand in a group of five of which the central temple is always bigger in size than the corner ones. These temples of *Panchayana* deities further prove the popularity of these divinities in the region in the past. Beautiful harmony of this form and conception is explicit through the *Thalara* group of stone temples and their sculptures. The temple of such type is called *Panchadeval*. Although the concept of *Panchadevala* evolved in the eight century, the *Panchadeval* of Western Nepal were built only in the fourteenth century (Pandey, 1997, p. 582&641).

There are some *Panchadeval* in Kathmandu Valley as well. *Panchadeval* of *Thapathali*, which was constructed by *Shree Teen Junga Bahadur*, is one of the important examples of this kind (Rana, 2017, p. 87). Similarly, in the southern part of Kathmandu Valley, there is another *Panchadeval* which was built by *Trailokya BirVikram Shah* (Regmi, 2050, p. 257). In Nepal, *Panchadeval* are observed to construct into two designs which are longitudinal and *Mandala* structural forms. The temples of *Debalhat* of *Baitadi* have been constructed on the longitudinal platform whereas the temples of *Bhurti* of *Dhailekh* seem to be of *Mandala* forms (Pandey, 1997, p. 641-644).

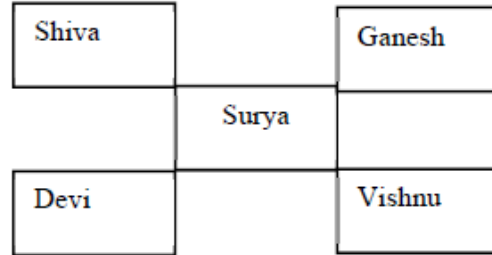
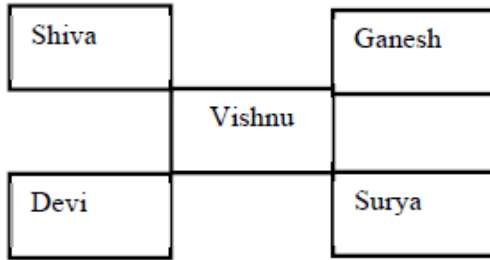
The temples of *Panchayan* deities are addressed with different names on the basis of their structural forms and worshipping system. The deities established in the middle are known through the shrine with the name of the deity. For example if Lord Shiva is dedicated into the middle then that is known as the shrine of *Shiva Panchayan*. Similarly, others are known as the *Surya Panchayana*, *Vishnu Panchayan*, *Devi Panchayan* and *Ganesh Panchayan*.

In Nepal *Shiva Panchayan* seems more popular among the devotees than the other ones. One can observe the images of lord *Vishnu*, *Devi*, *Surya* and *Ganesh* in the niches on the four corners of the small *Saivite* temple. In the case of the huge structural Shiva temple, the images of four deities seem to have been depicted into the separate small shrines on the four corners. The temple of *Indreswor* of *Panauti* and *Mahadeva* temple of *Tripureswor* are known as the best illustrations of this kind (Gurung, 2061, p.167). According to Kane while constructing the *Panchadeval* and establishing the images of *Panchayan* gods the following architectural and iconographic features should be adopted.

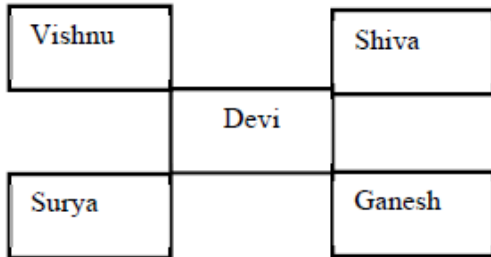
Vishnu- Shiva	Vishnu- Surya	Vishnu- Shiva	Shiva- Ganesh	Shiva- Ganesh
Ganesh	Shiva	Devi	Vishnu	Surya
Devi- Surya	Devi-Ganesh	Surya-Ganesh	Devi- Surya	Devi- Vishnu

(Kane, 1980, 394)

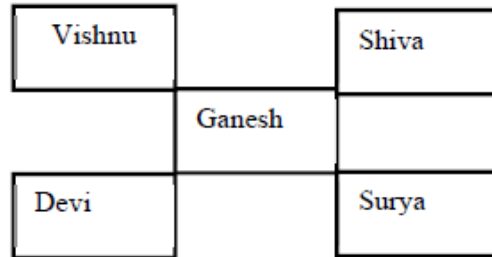
The description of above mentioned table can be presented through the following figures as well:



Vishnu Panchayan

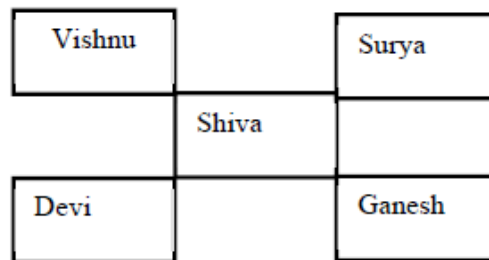


Surya Panchayan



Devi Panchayan

Ganesh Panchayan



Shiva Panchayan

(Source: National Museum, 2019, pp. 19-20).

The above mentioned table and figures show that there is a certain criterion for the construction and establishment of *Panchadeval* and *Panchayan* gods. If *Vishnu* depicts in the middle as the main deity, there will be *Shiva* and *Ganesh* on the right and left on the top, while *Devi* and *Surya* on the bottom respectively. Similarly, if there is *Surya* in the center there will be *Shiva* and *Ganesh* on the right and left on the top whereas, *Devi* and *Vishnu* on the bottom respectively. If *Devi* depicts in the middle, there will be *Vishnu* and *Shiva* displayed on the right and left of the upper part, while *Surya* and *Ganesh* depict on right and left on the lower part respectively. Likewise, while *Ganesh* keeps in the center there will be *Vishnu* and *Shiva* in the right and left on the top whereas, *Devi* and *Surya* on the bottom respectively. Similarly, if there is *Shiva* in the center there will be *Vishnu* and *Surya* on the top whereas, *Devi* and *Ganesh* in the right and left corner on the bottom respectively.

Sculpture of National Museum

There is an image of *Panchayan* god in the stone art section of the national museum where you can observe very beautiful five figures in a panel. In this panel there is an image of *Devi* in the middle, therefore this is named as the *Devi Panchayana*. According to the record of the

national museum it was collected and registered on 27/26/12 and has dimensions of 26 cm and 22 cm in length and breadth respectively (National Museum, 2019, p.20). The figure and sculpture is given below:

Vishnu		Shiva
	Devi	
Surya		Ganesh

Devi Panchayan



Sculpture of *Devi Panchayan*

The whole panel is guarded by the twisted and beautifully carved body of the seven serpents from top to bottom and right to left parts as well. The top part of the sculpture is nicely covered by a canopy of seven serpent hoods. Under it one can observe some beautiful carvings of plants. All the images of this panel look similar through the perspectives of carving skill and style, physical appearance and features as well. Goddess *Kali* appears to be seated at the center on the lotus base. *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are displayed on the right and left of the upper part, while *Surya* and *Ganesh* are depicted on the right and left corners on the lower part of the sculpture respectively.



Devi

Sculpture of *Goddess* depicted in the middle

The main deity *Devi* is depicted in the middle. *Devi* is also worshiped as one of the five deities in the *Smarta* tradition. She seats on the lion and demon. Her right leg is on the lion while the left one is on the demon. The seating posture of the goddess looks like the *pralabapadasan*. *Devi* has ten hands. Among the ten, one upper hand holds the skull and the other exposes a fearless gesture. Remaining others hold the attributes carried by the goddess. There is a simple nimbus with flame and decorated triangular shaped head crown on her head. Similarly, flower shape earrings on the ears, two layer simple necklace and long garland on the neck, *tika* on his forehead, bangles and armlets on the wrists and arms, and drapery on the lower part of the body and simple anklet on the ankle are the major ornaments and dresses seem to have been used on the figure of goddess.



Vishnu

Sculpture of *Vishnu* depicted in the right side of upper part

Viahnu is one of the five deities considered as equivalent aspects and means to realize Brahman in the *Smarta* tradition. There is an image of lord *Vishnu* on the right side of the upper part of the panel. The foremost Lord in the *Shrutis* is *Vishnu*. In this panel Vishnu sits on his mount Garuda. The seating posture of Vishnu is *padmasan*. He has four hands and holds different attributes which he carries generally. The right hands hold the *Chakra* i.e. flaming wheel and *shankha* i.e. conch whereas; the left hands are carrying *gada* i.e. mace and *padma* i.e. lotus. Decorated triangular crown on the head, flower shaped earrings on the ears, simple necklace and garland on the neck, *tika* on his forehead, and armlets on the arms, belt on the waist and drapery on the lower part of the body are the major ornaments and garments seemed to use on the figure of Vishnu.



Sculpture of *Shiva* depicted in the left side of upper part

Likewise, there is an image of lord *Shiva* on the left side of the upper part of the panel. Shiva is one of the five deities worshiped in the *Smarta* tradition. This inscribed image of *Shiva* is seated on his mount *nandi* (bull) with touching the *nandi* and raising the knee through right and slightly bent on the *nandi* of the left one. This seating posture is called *sukhasan* mood in iconographic science. There are four hands. Among them, the right one is holding a double drum while the other one is presenting a fearless gesture. Likewise, there are trident and rosary beads on his left hands. Simple nimbus with flame, triangular shape crown on the head, serpent earrings on the ears, simple necklace and beads on the neck, *tika* on his forehead, serpent bangles on the wrists, armlets on the arms, belt on the waist and drapery on the lower part of the body and simple anklet on the ankle are the major ornaments and garments seem to have been used on the figure of Shiva.



Sculpture of *Surya* depicted in the right side of lower part

Similarly, there is an image of lord *Surya* on the right side of the lower part of the panel. *Surya* is a Sanskrit word that means the sun. Ancient Indian literature mentions different synonyms such as *Aditya*, *Arka*, *Bhanu*, *Savitru*, *Puyshana*, *Ravi*, *Martanda*, *Mitra*, *Vishnu*, *Bhaskar*, *Divakara*, *Suryanarayan* of the god *Surya*. He is the son of *Kashyapa* and *Aditi*. *Chhaya*, *Saranyu/Sandhya* and *Ratri* are his consorts. *Shraddhadeva*, *Manu*, *Yama*, *Yamuna*, *Shani*, *Tapati*, *Bhadra*, *KarnaSugriv* and *Suwarchala* are the children of *Surya*. *Surya* is venerated as the solar divinity for the Hindus. This tradition has had a long history in Nepal as well. The month of *Paush* and Sunday is known as the special worshipping month and day of the god *Surya*.

Surya is also worshiped as one of the five deities in the *Smarta* tradition. *Surya's* iconography is often depicted riding a chariot harnessed by horses, often seven in number which represent the seven colour rays of the rainbow. But there is a lack of a chariot and seven horses in this sculpture which is mentioned in the iconography. This inscribed image of *Surya* has seated on the peer of a horse in *kamalasan* posture. Horses are beautified by different things and stand facing the opposite direction. There are four hands. Among them, the right and left lower hands are holding the lotus flower while both upper hands are showing fearless gestures. The head of the *Surya* is also decorated by the head crown whereas; there is simple garland of his neck.



Ganesh

Sculpture of *Ganesh* depicted in the left side of lower part

Likewise, there is an image of lord *Ganesh* on the left side of the lower part of the panel. *Ganesh* is also worshiped as one of the five deities in the *Smarta* tradition. *Ganesh* is the most popular deity in both Hindu and Buddhist religion in Nepal. From the very beginning *Ganesh* has been worshiped in different forms and names in the Indian sub-continent and several other countries from the very earlier. In Nepal the cults of *Ganesh* were very popular during the *Lichchhavi* and medieval period as well. During the reign of *Malla* dynasty plenty of religious monuments, sculptures and paintings concerned with Lord *Ganesh* have been constructed by the Kings and others. Nowadays, this tradition of worshiping Lord *Ganesh* is also widespread and has become popular in the Nepalese society.

This inscribed image of *Ganesh* has him seated on the peer of a mouse with his right leg slightly bent and touching the mouse and with an erect left knee. This seating posture is exactly opposite to that of *Shiva*, which is also known as the *sukhasan* mood. The physical features and attributes found in the other images can also be found in this image too. There are four hands which hold what the things Lord *Ganesh* traditionally holds. The upper left hand is holding an axe and the lower one is carrying some sweets whereas, the upper right is holding rosary beads and the lower one is holding an *ankush* i.e. hook. Simple nimbus with flame, triangular shape crown on the head, serpent earrings on the ears, simple necklace and beads on the neck, *tika* on his forehead, serpent bangles on the wrists, armlets on the arms, and drapery on the lower part of the body and simple anklet on the ankle are the major ornaments and garments seemed to have been used on the figure of *Ganesh*.

Finding Features

This panel is known as the masterpieces of *Panchayan* gods of stone sculpture of Nepal. Unfortunately, due to the absence of date and inscription, it is difficult to provide the absolute date of its creation. This is regarded as the illustrative example of stone work which reveals the high classed and well trained workmanship of artists. The round facial structure, elasticity and flexibility of body, dynamic and alive nature, use of simple head crown, different types of beads and ornaments are the common characteristics of the sculptures whereas, the specific features are as following:

- The whole figure is shown under a canopy of seven serpent hoods.

- It is a panel of *Devi Panchayana* where there is an image of *Devi* in the middle.
- Goddess *Kali* appears to be seated at the center, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are displayed on the right and left of the upper part and *Surya* and *Ganesh* are depicted on the right and left on the lower part.
- The images of *Devi*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Surya* and *Ganesh* look similar through the perspectives of carving skill and style, physical appearance and features as well.
- It is an important stone sculpture belonging to the 17th century CE.
- One can observe a slightly tantric influence in these art objects.
- Finding features of art objects indicates that during the sculpturing the panel artists seemed to follow the direction of iconographic science.
- It is an image which presents high religious tolerance between the devotees of *Shaiva*, *Vaishnav*, *Shakta*, *Ganaptya* and solar cults.

Dating Issue

Creation of sculpture is one of the oldest traditions in the history of mankind. On the basis of findings of archaeological evidence from the prehistoric caves of France, Spain and other parts of the world the antiquities of sculpturing art objects can be traced back to the prehistoric culture and civilization (Burkitt, pp.121-165). Findings of art objects of the period suggest that people of prehistoric culture were skilled to create beautiful and wonderful art specimens as the form of sculpture arts.

The art and images were started to be made in this sub-continent from the Indus Valley Civilization i.e. 2500 BC, where we find figures of bearded man of limestone, dancing figure and bull in bronze, the terracotta or steatite seals with *Pashupati* and other figures. There are terracotta figurines depicting a wide range of subjects of human, animal and plant life. The earliest figures of the flat hipped mother goddesses from *Lauriya Nandangarha*, *Piprahawa stupa* and some of the excavated sites in India, prove the continuity of art traditions during the first millennium before Christ. The *Naga*, *Yaksha* and *Yakshini* figures were carved at different places in this sub-continent around the 4th century BC (HMG, 1996, p. 100).

In Nepal, where you can observe the different types of prehistoric artifacts and tools are well preserved and displayed in the National Museum, which were made by stone. This evidence suggests that from the prehistoric period the stone work existed as the forms of art in Nepalese territories. Apart from this, sculpturing the images were started here in Nepal during the 1st century AD, but in the beginning, the image in Nepal had been imported from Mathura and very soon a Nepalese school of art was started here during the 1st century after Christ. This school had heavily borrowed the main characteristics of Mathura art school in the early stage; later on; it developed its own style and features (HMG, 1996, p.100). In this respect, we can mention the images like Mother Goddesses of *Haugal Bahal*, *Bagalamukhi* in *Patan* and *Ganesh* temple, *Kirtipur*, *Gajalaxmi* of *Chyasaltol*, *Patan*, *Shri- Laxmi* of *Handigaon* as the best illustrations of early stone sculptures of Nepal.

There is a lack of date and inscription associated with this illustrative panel, so it is a very difficult task to identify the exact date when this piece of stone work was created. In archaeology, there are two types of dating methods which are absolute and relative. Due to absenteeism of date and inscription, we can go through the relative dating method to determine the date of these works of art. No doubt, the tradition of creation of sculpture had come into practice from very early in Nepal, but it is a very difficult task to determine the absolute date of origin. Finally, on the basis of above mentioned discussion, judging physical

appearance, finding features, craftsmanship and technology, analyzing skill and style, quality of stone, use of beads and ornaments and other evidence, the date of this art object is estimated to be about 17th century CE.

6. Conclusion

Panchayana is an integrated worshiping system of five deities such as *Surya*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Shakti* and *Ganesh*. It belongs to the *smartism* sect, which is one of the four major religious *sampradaya* of Hinduism. The followers of *Panchdeva Puja* believe that it helps to attain happiness, progress and peace. Some scholars view this tradition as an attribute to *Adi-Sankaracharya* in the 8th century CE. But archaeological findings suggest that this practice came into existence during the *Kushan* Empire (pre-300 CE). Similarly, according to the description found in *Pancham Atharvasiris* of *Atharvaved* the antiquity of this tradition can be traced till to the Vedic Period.

However, in the Indian subcontinent including Nepal, the tradition of *Panchayan puja* seems very popular among the followers of Hindu. In this region the tradition of constructing sculptures of five deities and *Panchadeval* in a group has come into existence from 11th to 12th century CE. Meanwhile, there were plenty of images and *Panchadeval* created and constructed in this subcontinent. In Nepal, especially from the Far and Mid Western regions several shrines and images concerning this cult have been discovered. Among them, the image displayed in the stone art section of the national museum is an important one. In this panel there is an image of *Devi* in the middle, therefore it belongs to *Devi Panchayana*. Similarly, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* are displayed on the right and left of the upper part, while *Surya* and *Ganesh* are depicted on the right and left corners on the lower part respectively. The whole figure is shown under a canopy of seven serpent hoods.

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