

The Pair Lion Motif in Shiva Temple of Medieval Bengal: Its Source and Evaluation

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Abstract

Lions, particularly male lions, have been an important symbol for thousands of years and appear as a theme in cultures across Europe, Asia, and Africa. The cultural significance of stucco pair lion motif in Shiva temples of Bengal and relates with various types of representation of the same motif found in others. The pair Lion used as stucco (Jora Shiva Temple, Muroli, Jessore district). Shiva is the braver among the all God and Goddesses in Hindu religion during the early period and still. Thus we have found many Shiva temple build in Bengal (present West Bengal(Paschimbango) and Bangladesh). This article try to analyses about how the pair lion motif is depicting of the Shiva temple and what is the relation between Shiva and lion under Mythology and Purana. Shiva is the second most important male deity of Hindu. The usual Shiva –lingam’s which were mainly worshipped in the temples and under trees or in an open space. We would have tried to decipher about Pair Lion Motif decoration of 18th – 19th century Shiva temple of Bangladesh. Those would have to help the history of evaluation of stylized art waves is coming out by its decoration motif with ritual, beliefs and faith of Bengal society. We may look at the artistic tradition of lion sculptures those are widely found from different parts of west Bengal and Bangladesh.

Keywords: Pair Lion, Motif, Shiva Temple, Bangladesh.

“The Myth is not my own, I had
it from my mother.”

--Euripides¹

Introduction

Lions, particularly male lions, have been an important symbol for thousands of years and appear as a theme in cultures across Europe, Asia, and Africa.² The most consistent depiction is in keeping with their image of "king of the Jungle" or "king of the Beasts", lions are popular symbols of royalty, heraldry, stateliness and a symbol of bravery. The common motif of the "majestic and powerful" lion was introduced to China by Buddhist missionaries from India, somewhere in the 1st century AD.³

Hindu believes that lions protect humans from evil spirits, and frequently used in sculpture, decoration in traditional Bengali architecture. The Lion motif⁴ used in as terracotta and sculpture in architecture of Bengal as like various animal. On the other hand, pair lion pattern depicted as decorative format. Sometimes single lion appeared as Horse shape⁵ (**Plate 17**), Snake shape, Man shape⁶ (**Plate 15**), kirttimukha⁷, Shimhamukha⁸ and Narshimha. Basically, lion used as *bahan* or vehicle of Durga as Uma/Mahishmardini deities (**Plate 4**). The association of Durga with lion is common ritual embrace, believed to bring a lion and is practiced in Bengal. Uma is wife of Shiva. Shiva is the braver among the all god.⁹ This paper will attempt to reconstruct a setting, the milieu, how the pair lion motif is depicting in Shiva temple during the 18th to 19th century and what is the relation between Shiva and lion under mythology and *Purana*?

As per my preliminary Study, there have found six Shiva temple in Bangladesh where used this pair lion motif. It's used in the main facade and over the main entrance of the temple, as: Jora Shiva Mondir (**Plate 1**), Muroli, Jessore; Shila Roy Mondir (**Plate 2**), Birampur, Jessore; Putiya Shiva Temple (**Plate 5**) Rajshahi; Krishna Temple at Dinajpur Rajbari; Chandina Shiva temple (**Plate 18**), Comilla and Akhra Para Mondir (**plate 3**) Muroli, Jessore.

Jora Shiva Temple, Jessore

Jora Shiva Temple towards northwest, at a distance of about 200 yards, of the Imambara and close to the Muroli Jessore metalled road are to be seen two east facing single chambered temples standing abreast in a north south line. They are similar in size and shape. There used the Pair Lion Motif as stucco with pilaster in this Temple (**Plate 1**) facade at Muroli under Jessore district. This stucco made by usually white lime and grey red color. It is a real Lion and its mane, tail, and paws are showing as a running position. It is rampant style lion. This temple contains an inscription which records the date of construction in 1189 BS equal 1784 AD.¹⁰ This temple stands on a solid platform which is 2 feet 6 inch in height. The building proper is 16 feet square in plan externally and has an arched doorway on its east.

Akrapara Temple, Jessore

Akrapara Mondir (**Plate 3**) content found same illustration. At present, it is very fragile. The temple's survival is threatened by the newly established school nearby and the lack of conservation efforts. This temple is situated on the north west of Muroli bus stoppage at a distance about 300 feet, is lying a south facing building that goes by the name Akhrapar Mondir's. It stands on a 4 feet high solid platform and occupies a rectangular space measuring 42 feet since from north to south and 25 feet 3 inch from east to west. On ground of its architecture, the date of late 19th century AD.¹¹

Shila Ray Temple, Jessore

Plate 2, Here, same pair lion motif/illustration depicted on the above of entrance façade with stucco decoration. Local people have been colored with modern white color. It is not protected monument of Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh. It is Shila Ray Chowdhury Bari Temple and situated at Birampur of Jessore sadar upozila and closed by Nayapara Ray family zaminder house beside Bhairab river passing away.

Puthia Temple, Rajshahi (Plate 5)

This Temple erected between 1823 and 1895 AD, by one of the Maharani's (Rani Bhubon Mohini) of the Puthia Estate. Beside Jagaddhatri or Bara Annik Temple has also triangle Terracotta plaque and used running lion position. It is late 18th century AD temple. Now it is protected monument of department of Archaeology of Bangladesh.¹² Here lion figure depicted as terracotta pattern.

Krishna Temple, Dinajpur

Here same illustration depicting and cultured by terracotta plaques. This temple is adjacent of Dinajpur Rajbari complex, erected 1752, by Maharaja Pran Nath of Dinajpur.

Chandina Shiva Temple Comilla

Candina Shiva temple (**Plate 18**), is *aat chala* type temple in 19th century and contemporary of Jessore Jora Shiva mondri Chanchra Shiva temple. Here same Pair Lion illustration depicting above on the entrance. It is also stucco decoration. The Chanchra Shiva temple is *aat chala* Shiva temple in Jessore, which is built in 1696 AD in according to Sanskrit inscription on a brick tablet and the 18th century Rameshwar temple at Naldhanga closed by.¹³

Others architecture

In West Bengal temple architecture, have found depicted Lion figure, not a real shape of lion, along with Shiva temple. We find the shape of Snake's mouth of lion in Hugly temple and Madanmohon temple at Bishnupur Bankura. There are many temple, where we have found lion motif used as terracotta form and also, various example in Buddhist vihara, as: Paharpur Mahavihara at Naogaon, Shalban Vihar in Mainamoti at

Comilla(plate 8 and 9). Same type Corner bonding Juxtaposed animals terracotta plaque (Plate 7) at the top pair lion in Jessore Naldanga Temple (Now it preserved at Gurusadoy Museum). In British period, we got pair lion form used in the main gate of palace architecture as example is that Balihati Zaminder palace, Pattishar kachari house(plate 23) of Rabindranath Tagor at Sirajganj, which is people called lion Gate(*shinho daraja*). Friezes of walking lions are found between the horizontal moldings on the seventeenth century Mathurapur *deul*. Here lions have fantastic heads and long tails(Michell, 1983: 160). Sometimes lions appear in wall panels of eighteenth century temple (Bahabpur); on letter temples seated lions fill triangular panels above the corners (many 19th century Midnapur examples). Confronted lions raising themselves up on their paws are sometimes used as a parapet (Alangiri Raghunath Temple), or as part of a neoclassical frame (Chandrakana Shiva Temple in Gazipur).¹⁴

Hindu Myth and religion

Shiva is the second most important male deity of Bengal. Shiva -*lingam* which were mainly worshipped in the temples. Durga is famous deity also and Durga is wife of shiva and Lion is as a *bahan* of goddesses Uma/Durga.¹⁵ The Mahisasurmardini motif (plate 4, 12 & 13) is common on many of the late medieval brick temple of Bengal, where Durga riding her vehicle lion as Pratapeswar Temple of Ambika Kalna at Burdwan built in 1849; Bisheshwar Temple of Sribati at Burdwan; the Radaha gobinda Temple, Aatpur (Antpur, Plate 14) was built in 1787, constructed by Krishnaram Mitra, the Dewan of Maharaja of Burdwan; Ramchandra Temple, Guptipara, Hooghly; Rajrajeswar Temple, Kotolpur (Hooghly); and Jagatdhattri, Naldanga Temple, Jessore(Plate 6).

Shiva is also the creative, fertile, generative principle and in this aspect he is represented by the phallic symbol of the *lingam*. Several books in Sanskrit and Bangla have been written about Shiva. Among them *Shivapurana*, *Rghuvamsa*(2.35:410), *Lingapurana* and *Bhagavadgita*(3.37:411) (Alain Danielou, 1991:220) are more noted. In the Bangla *Mangalkavya*, the story of Shiva is an essential component of the canto about gods. Childless women of both Muslim and Hindu communities visit these temples, believing that Shiva can make them fertile.¹⁶ The pillars of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka have lion sculptures as a symbol of royal power (Plate 11). Though, lion is part of some Jataka stories, Panchtantra, Kalila-wa-dimna, Gilgamesh, Samson, Heraclea, Sphinx etc. Common people, the artists were also interested in lions. But mostly imagination was used to draw the images and this fact becomes clear from the figures where the edge of the mouth is like a horse. In another side, its eyes and eye-brows are slightly engraved, the presentation of lions – paws with sharp nails, mane, tail, neck and back of the body proved that the images were made lions.¹⁷ As well as we have found clear scene about horse and lion in *Mirtulata* terracotta plaque of Antpur Temple of Hugly (Plate 14). Especially, Horse's mouth is long shape and thin, but Lion face is round shape.

On the other hand, in Buddhism lions are symbolic of the *Bodhisattavas*,¹⁸ the sons of the Buddha or Buddha's lion. *Bodhisattvas* are being who have attained a high level of spiritual development. The lion in their role of dharma protectors supporting the throne of the Buddha's and *Bodhisattvas* (Jampa Chosky, 1988: 28). They are also found at the entrance of the monasteries and shrines, in the northern area of Nepal, influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and art. The iconographic representation of the lion originated in Persia.¹⁹ A lion faced *Dakini*, a tantric deity described as a female embodiment of enlightened energy, appears in Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetan Buddhist form is known as *Simhamukha* in Sanskrit and *Senge Dongma*.

Discussion

It is also a matter of surprise and investigation that why in the 19th century and the succeeding years when under the British patronization the composite European motif from Europe was brought up efficiently in the Bengalese temple architecture, a simultaneous used lion, *sahib* figures as well as in the Mughal emperor Jahangir's painting,²⁰ where a lion sat under Jahangir's leg. However, this illustration depicting in Shiva temple architecture on the facade and main entrance during 18th & 19th century in Bengal, was three reasons as: Firstly, though this pattern used at Paharpur, Mainamati Buddhist vihara in ancient Bangladesh i.e. lion is depicting in stone sculpture of shiva parvati, which is preserved at Mainamati Archaeological Museum at Comilla. Another one is that two lion one head based terracotta plaque in corner bonding ornament in Shalban vihara at Mainamati in Comilla(Plate 8). Those are 9th to 11th centuries art. Next 17th century when again Hindu temple architecture flourishes then it's used. May be, this pattern was come as attracting pleasure of British and where many British were painting on lion hunting more. Though, Lion is an Asian animal. May be it's came by local influence and ritual stylized.

Secondly, may be not come this influence from Nepal or china, then it's used generally in our house doorway easily, because Lion is the most significant for China and also Nepal; Nepal's people used in their house for removing them from *saitan*/devil. Though Chinese guardian lions are frequently used in sculpture in traditional Chinese architecture. For instance, in the Forbidden City in Beijing, two lion statues are seen in almost every door entrance. Actually, the common motif of the majestic and powerful lion was introduced to China by Buddhist Missionaries from India, sometimes in the 1st century AD.

Thirdly, lion is not *Bahan* of shiva, Shiva's *bahan* is *Garur*, yet Uma, who is called Durga and in here we know by the myth and Purana says that Uma's *bahan* is lion. Thus they used lion in Shiva temple. Lion is a braver

symbol and fertile also (**Plate 16**). Hindu women believe Shiva lingam is a symbol of fertile and thus they go to Shiva temple to worship it before of pregnancy for getting good position of fertile.²¹

Beside this, East India company defeated Nawab in 1757 as well as after defeated Tipu sultan, East India Company published shield and medal where they used lion and next their emblem pattern was pair lion in 1777 (Divyabhansinh, 2005:116). The “Serlingapatam Medal” struck to commemorate the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799 (**Plate 21**) has the British lion conquering Tipu’s tiger -- engraving in medal. This is National Museum of Scotland collection. It is the Arms of Rajkumar College in 1870 AD at Rajkot (**Plate 20**). Here two lion is showing their *rajvokti*, we see throne is on the head of lion.²² It shows pair or two rampant lions Regadant. The Arms of the East India Company in 1709 AD (**Plate 19**). And also we have found book’s title page of British Period and Government of Bengal published from department of industries in 1903 AD (**Plate 22**), where used Coat of the Arms of the British. Now it is preserved at Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka. Here used Emblem of British Empire in contemporary, they struck everywhere for showing their power.

Though the pair lion motif was the symbol of British from Victorian age, which is a symbol of brave, strength courage. We have noticed that lion used Asoka pillar (the Coat of Arms of UK, **Plate 10**),²³ which used more than earlier of British. Also, the Coat of Arms of India (**Plate 11**) was taken from the Sarnath Lion Capital that was built by an Indian emperor named Asoka. It’s a pillar in the city named Sarnath. Asoka built it around 250 BC. Usually, the pair lion symbol depicted like Roman counterpart “Janus” – “Jana”,²⁴ like “yesterday” and “today” as well as weighing “life” and “laws” in her balance “protector” and “fertile” in according to British influence. Which is the mentioned of British Imperial power (Jack Tresidder, 2004: 291).

Conclusion

Motif stands for a constituent feature of a painting, sculpture or a architectural monument. In such a composition it appears as a symbolic or stylistic representation of the main theme to be elaborated on or developed. Sometimes a repeated figure in design of art also creates a motif. It is used mainly for enhancing the decorative value of the concerned work (Sudipa, 2002:1). Gautam Sengupta who first drew attention to somewhat similar foliated tail end of the lion on terracotta plaques. Found from the Buddhist monastic establishment of Jagjivanpur in Malda district of West Bengal. Says “...there is an element of comicality in the rendering of lions, their tails swinging upwards and ending in a flower- shaped knot.”²⁵ The pair lions as guardians of the temple are represented in pair at the entrance of compounds. We may look at the artistic tradition of lion sculptures those are widely found from different parts of west Bengal and Bangladesh. Though Lion is believes of Hindu religion, yet especially it has been spread with temple architecture during the late medieval period by British influence.

Notes and References

1. Rama P. Coomaraswamy, *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on Myth and Meaning*, Princeton University, USA, 1997, p.28.
2. The Lion is the most ferocious beast among wild creatures. Because of its large body, huge strength, mane and some other qualities, the lion is called the king of the animals. From primitive era the lion is considered as the symbol of strength and power.
3. Gupta, S. P., *The Roots of Indian Art* (A detailed study of the formative period of Indian Art and architecture: Third and Second centuries B.C. - Mauryan and Late Mauryan), B. R. publication, Delhi, 1980, pp. 121-122. (see also Asokan Pilalar at Sarnath plate 3a).
4. Explaining the terms “Motif” the well known folklorist Stith Thompson writes, “while the term motif is used very closely to include any of the elements going into a traditional tale, it must be remembered that in order to become a real part of the tradition on element must have something about it that will make people remember and repeat it” a lion itself is not a motif but a flying lion becomes one, because it is a least thought to be unusual.
5. Horse shape lion in Surul at Birbhum; *gaja singho* in Bishnupur at Bunkura.
6. Man shape, fig. 27, Amiyo kumer Bandyopadhyay, “Mandir Bhaskarje Protifolito Samajchitra”, *Paschimbanger Mondir Terracotta*, Calcutta, 2008.
7. *Krittimukha* is a decorative motif showing the grinning face of a lion. (fig.73, pravha - tarana, fig. 74, sketh: 2, Sudipa Bandyapadhyay, 2002).
8. *Singhomuk* (snake shape) in Madanmohon Temple of Bishnupur at Bankura; *Singhomanob* (Triangle sculpture) in Baranagar at Murshidabad.
9. *Banglapedia*: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, (Chief Editor Sirajul Islam) Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Vol. 9, 2003, p. 273, (“Shiva” by Paresh Chandra Mandal).
10. Md. Mosharraf Hossain, *Greater Jessore: Archaeological Survey Report*, Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2005, p.14.
11. Md. Mosharraf Hossain, *Greater Jessore: Archaeological Survey Report*, Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2005, p.15.
12. Nazly Chowdhuri and Babu Ahamed, *Selected Hindu Temples of Bangladesh*, (ed. Dr. Md. Shafiqul Alam) UNESCO, Dhaka, 2005, p.37.

13. Nazimuddin Ahmed, *Discover the Monuments of Bangladesh*, (A guide to their history, location and developments), John Sandy(ed.), The University Press limited, Dhaka, 1984, pp.105-106
14. George Michell, (ed.) *Brick Temples of Bengal*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p.160.
15. *Banglapedia*: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh, 2003, (Chief Editor Sirajul Islam) Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Vol. 9, p. 273, (“Shiva” by Pares Chandra Mandal).
16. *Ibid.*
17. See also, Muhammad shohrab uddin and shaermin rezowana, “animal (mammal) representation in Somapura Mahabihara *in situ* terracotta plaques”, *Journal of Bengal art*, vol. 17, 2012, p.194, (pl. 15.10, 15.11, 15.13 and 15.16).
18. Ven. Jampa Chisky, “Symbolism of Animals in Buddhism,” *Buddhist Himalaya*, vol. 1, no.1, gokan co. ltd., 1988, p.37.
19. *ibid.*
20. Asok Kumar Das, *Mughal Painting during Jahangir’s Time*, The Asiatic Society of Kolkata, Calcutta, India, 1978, plate 64; others related painting “The Dauphin”, Francois of valos, son of Francis 1 of Frence. Later sixteenth century French engraving, tinted and inlaid into a surround of cherubs holding a cram and the lion lying down with the lamb , themes which frequently occur in portraits of himself ordered by Jahangir. C. 1610-20 AD, 20.4 × 28.7 cm. Ink and wash on paper. (see. *Mughal Miniatures*, by J. M. Rogers, British Museum press, 1993, London, fig. 73, p. 105); *King of the World : The Padshanama* (An imperial mughal manuscript from the royal library, Windsor Castle), Milo Creveland Beach and Ebba Koch with new translations by Wheeler Thackston, Azimuth editions: Sackler Gallery, 1997, New Delhi.
21. *Ibid.*, *Banglapedia*. and also see B. N. Mukhaje, “An early syncretistic icon”, in *Hakim Habibur Rahman khan commemoration volume*, Enamul haque (ed.), ICSBA, 2001, Dhaka, p. 63, (article no. 3, plate. 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3).
22. Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia’s Lions*, Marg publications, Mumbai, 2005.p.116.
23. Divyabhanusinh, *The Story of Asia’s Lions*, Marg publications, Mumbai, 2005.p.118.
24. Jack Tresidder, (ed.), *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols in Myth, Art and Literature*, Duncan Baird Publishers, London, 2004, p. 291, See, The lions of yesterday and tomorrow from an illustration to an ancient Egyptian “Book of the Dead”.
25. Sutapa Sinha, “A New Light on the Significance of Lion Motif appeared on Coins and on single Inscription of the sultans of Bengal”, *Journal of Bengal Art*, vol. 16, 2011, p.139-155, Dhaka,(plate 10.16A, B & C).

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Plate 1: Pair Lion motif, Stucco, main entrance, Jorbangla Shiva Temple, Muroli, Jessore, 1784 AD.



Plate 2: Pair Lion Motif, Stucco, white color, Shila Ray Chowdhury Bari Temple at Birampur in Jessore sadar upozila, late nineteenth century.



Plate 3: Fragile Lion motif, stucco in Akhrapara Mondir, main facade, Muroli, Jessore.

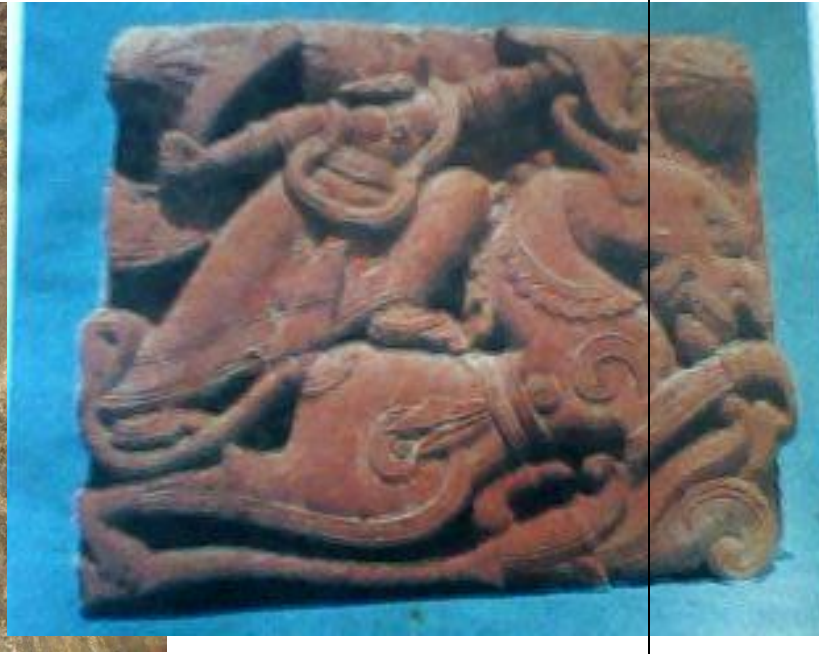


Plate 4: Mahismardini, Terracotta plaque of Bagha, Rajshahi, Varendra Research Museum collection.



Plate 5: Pair Lion, Terracotta, Puthia Temple, Rajshahi.



Plate 6: Jagatdhatri ride on the Lion, Jessore, Gurusadoy museum.



Plate 7: Corner bonding Juxtaposed animals terracotta plaque at the top pair lion, Jessore, Gurusadoy museum collection.



Plate 8: Shalban Vihar, Mainamati, Comilla



Plate 9: Shalban Vihar, Mainamati, Comilla



Plate 10: Coat of Arms of UK. From Internet.



Plate 11: Coat of Arms of India(symbol of the capital of the Asoka Pillar, Sanchi, Sarnath, India, 250 BC).

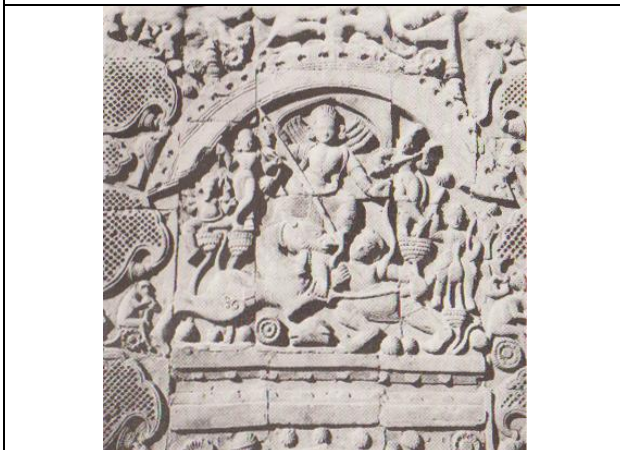


Plate 12: Mahishasurmardini, Durga with lion figure, Terracotta plaque, Burdhan.



Plate 13: Mahishasurmardini, Durga with lion figure, Terracotta Plaque, Burdhan.

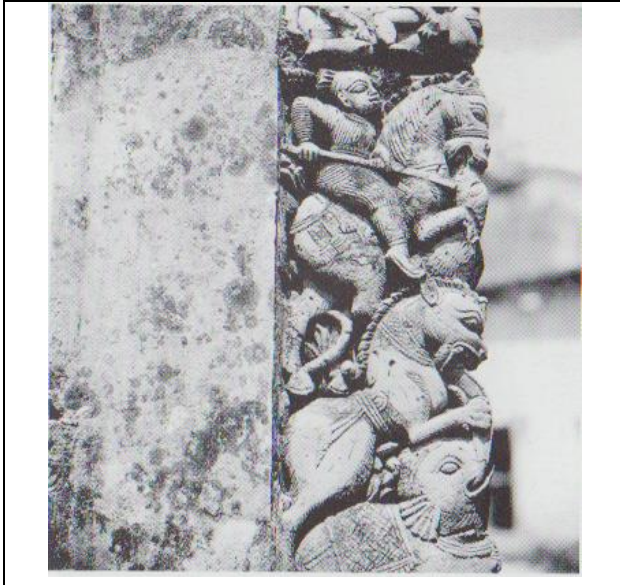


Plate 14: Mirtulata, Terracotta Plaque, Antpur,

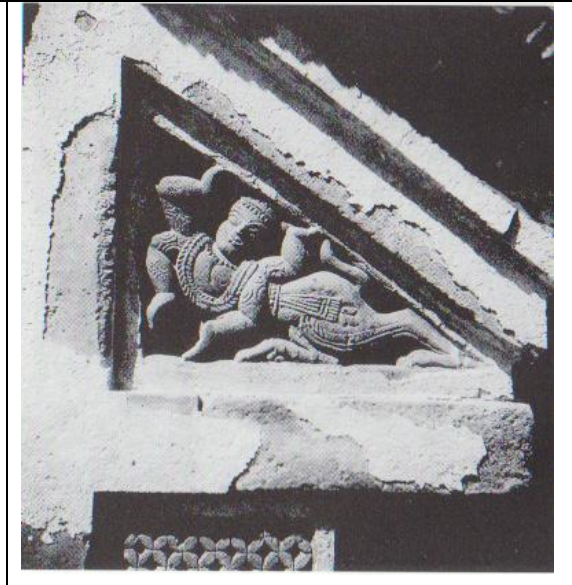


Plate 15: Singhomanob, Terracotta Plaque,

Hugly.(after Kalyankumer Ganguly)

Uchkoron, Birbhum.



Plate 16: Braver man with lion, Terracotta Plaque, Krishnampur, Hugly.

Plate 17: Horse shape lion, Terracotta Plaque, Surul, Birbhum.

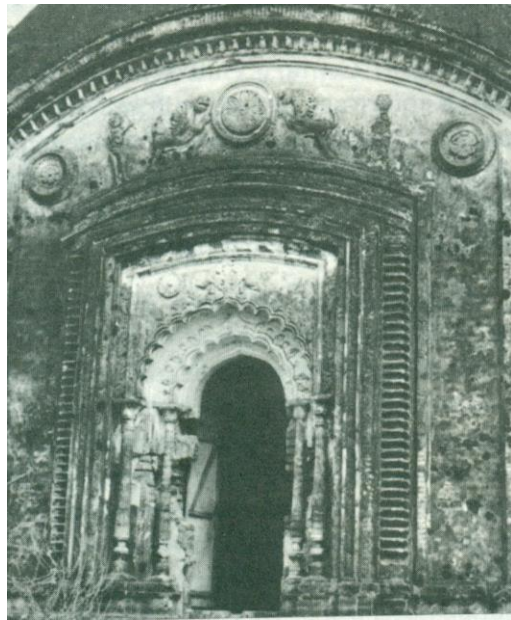


Plate 18: Chandina Shiva temple, 19th century, Comilla(after Nazimuddin Ahmed)



Plate 19: The arms of the East India company,1709. Courtesy: The Story of Asia’s Lions



Plate 20: The arms of Rajkumar college, Rajkot,1870



Plate 21: 1799, defeat Tipu Sultan, National Museum of Scotland



Plate 22: British Emblem used in Modern Cottage Tanning Bulletin in British period, 1903 AD.



Plate 23: Lion Gate of Patishar Kachari Bari at Shirajganj.

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