

Small Lives Mattered: Relocating and Reassessing *Godha*, the Indian Monitor Lizard, in Indian Art and Literature

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Abstract: The present paper elaborates on the reptile *Godha* or the Indian monitor lizard, by revisiting relevant chapters of Indian art and literature. This animal has been often overlooked and misidentified in contemporary academic discussions and detailed scrutiny of its correct identification has been pending. In the past, on the contrary, considerable attention was given to this animal in the texts as well as in religious images. Several textual references reveal a deeper association of this reptile with contemporary diet, ecology and socio-religious practices. In the paper, it has been pointed out that in early India and medieval period, the animal *Godha* was viewed with important religious connotations in attention to its dietary value. By examining depictions of the *Godha* in Hindu and Jaina sacred images, illustrations and examples, we can see that there are clear variations and noticeable differences between the early and later depictions which possibly derived from the transitions in contemporary society.

Introduction

Till today, legend lauds the daring feat of Tanaji Malusare, a subedar of *Koli* community and the commander of the Maratha army who is said to have climbed the stiff walls of the impregnable hill-fort of Sinhagad in Maharashtra (also known as *Killa Kondana*), assisted by his pet monitor lizard (*Ghorpad* in Marathi), *Yashwanti*, with a rope fastened to its tail and recaptured the fort from the Mughals in 1669. In Indian folklore, the monitor lizard is popularly known for its strong claws and firm grip (*Udumbu-pudi* in Tamil) and it is used as a toolkit for the upward climbing of stiff walls. The *Ghorpade* clan in Maharashtra claims an ancestral connection with Tanaji as a reason behind their skill of climbing walls like monitor lizards (Vidal 1888: 74).

The Indian monitor lizard, also known as the Bengal monitor, is a unique reptile of versatile character, connected to folklore, myths, medicinal practices and consumption



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habits. It belongs to genus *Varanus*, family *Varanidae*, class *Reptilia* and order *Squamata* (Lüders 1942: 23-50). It is known by several regional names, such as *Goh* in Hindi, *Goyra* in Rajasthani, *Ghorpad* in Marathi, and *Gosaap* in Bengali. These regional names, most likely, have derived from the term 'Godha' in Pali and Sanskrit languages. *Godha* or *Godhika* as the *vahana* of *Gauri* is referred to in the Hindu scriptures including the *Agni Purana* (Chapter 50: 13b-15, Chapter 52: 15). In the sacred art, this reptile is often depicted in the images of goddess *Parvati-Gauri*¹ as the *vahana* or the extension of the energy of the goddess (Picron 1980: 299).

Due to the lack of a comprehensive and specific academic discussion on this reptile, several previous scholars in the art-historical assessment of sculptures of *Parvati-Gauri*, have identified *Godha* as iguana or alligator-crocodile in an uncritical way. In this background, the present paper has contributed to the precise identification of 'Godha' as known from the ancient and medieval textual and visual traditions. This paper has elaborated on the association of this small animal with humans and ecology in the past through the examination of relevant ancient texts and sacred images, and by corroborating with available archaeological and zoological information.

Identification of *Godha* as Delineated in Indian Literature and Art

To begin with, let us examine the accurate identification of *Godha* in Indian textual and visual traditions. The author believes that it is important to be categorical in Indological research where the data allows.

A) History of usage of the term

Godha in Sanskrit denotes a nominative singular word for the feminine gender. The early translation projects noted *Godha* as a monitor lizard alongside other meanings such as iguana and alligator. A prominent source of early translation has been the Sanskrit and Pali dictionaries of the 19th century. In 1872, Monier-Williams in the Sanskrit-English dictionary had provided different sets of meanings for this term. He has mentioned *Griha-Godha* or *Griha-Godhika* as the small house lizard, *Godha* as iguana, *gosamp* or *Godhi* as alligator or iguana and *Godhika* as a kind of lizard (Monier-Williams 1872: 295-300). He also mentioned *Trina-Godha* as a kind of newt or chameleon (Monier-Williams 1872: 382). At a later date, Apte (1890: 469) provided three translations: *Godha* as the alligator, *Godhi* as the Gangetic alligator and *Godhika* as a kind of lizard. MacDonnell (1893: 86) translated *Godha*, *Godhika* and *Godhara* as indifferentiable, meaning a kind of lizard. Cowell (1895: 297-298, 1897: 56-58) in the translation of the different *Godha-Jatakas* in the Pali literature used majorly lizard and iguana to refer to *Godha*.

In the 20th century, Indological researches principally followed these identifications through the above translation works. In reference *Godha-rupena* in *Mahavamsa* (Chapter 28, verse 9), the *Godha* was translated as an iguana (Davis and Stede 1952: 32). Stchoupak et al. (1959: 236) differentiated *Godha* from *Godhika* in the French translations and offered that *Godhi* can be translated as iguana or crocodile and the *Godhika* as a kind of lizard. Art historians such as Bhattacharya (1974: 128), Trivedi (1981: 58) and Rajeshwari (1989: 30) followed this translation as iguana, whereas other scholars including Rao (1914: 360), Bhattasali (1929: 199), and Picron (1980: 282-302) used either alligator or crocodile.

We can see that majority of scholars in the 20th century followed only a narrowed-down meaning of the term *Godha* and *Godhika* from the Pali and Sanskrit translation works. Such narrowing down resulted in single usage of this term as iguana and alligator which led to the misidentification.

Lüders (1942: 23-50) has clarified the confusion and treated this mistranslation in his elucidating paper in German language. He commented that the precise meaning of *Godha* should be monitor lizard or the *Varanus*, although the dictionaries and translations have rendered the meaning as iguana (Lüders 1942: 23-50). He has also noted that the diminutive *Godhika* refers to a smaller lizard, in particular the gecko (*Lacerta gecko*) and common use of terms, *Godhika* and *Golika* denoted lizards in the Indian literature (Lüders 1942: 35-36). This word appears in the compounds *Griha-Godhika* and *Agara-Godhika* as house lizards. From the textual references and present-day usage, it can be gathered that possibly in the past, this term was used to denote a subgroup of the former. Gradually both terms were used indiscriminately in the iconographic passages.

Jamison (1998: 254) supported this corrected identification and pointed out that despite the iguana being exclusively a 'New World Animal', the term in the 19th century is being used to address all lizards, and the modern works are simply copying this translation. Olivelle (1999: 349) followed the corrected translation for the term in the *Dharmasutras*.

In the 21st century CE, scholars and art-historians are increasingly using this corrected identification of *Godha* or *Godhika* as a lizard (van der Geer 2008: 24; Parpola 2011: 8; Guy 2019: 333; Mevissen 2019: 195). Yet some recent publications on the *Ayurvedic* practices are continuing with the misidentification of *Godha* as iguana (Dash and Kashyap 1991: 465; Ajantha et al. 2016: 4; Sheshadri 2017: 1-21).

B) *Godha*: not iguana

Scholars like Banerjee (1956: 501-502), Ghosh (1980: 157-158), Trivedi (1981: 25), Bhattacharyya (1983: 28), Mukhopadhyay (1984: 118), Pal (1988: 32), Joshi (1996a: 21) and Bhattacharya (2000: 181-183) have previously identified the *vahana Godha* as an iguana. The depiction of *Godha* in the images of *Parvati-Gauri* shows a considerable mismatch with the physical appearance of the lizards of genus *Iguana* of the family *Iguanidae*. The genus *Iguana* refers to the lizards (species such as *Iguana delicatissima*, *Iguana iguana* and *Iguana insularis*), which are native to the tropic areas of America and the Caribbean, such as Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean.² Apart from being imported, the iguana is not found in India. The lizards of different species of genus *Iguana* have protruding eyes near the throat, thinner skin attaching mouth with the body and prominent fans on the body. These physical features are completely absent in the depictions of *Godha* in the images of *Parvati-Gauri*. Fig. 1 in the paper delineates these differences between these two reptiles.

C) *Godha*: not crocodile-alligator

Scholars including Rao (1914: 360), Bhattasali (1929: 199), Bhattacharya (1974: 128), Trivedi (1981: 58) and Rajeshwari (1989: 30) have previously identified the *vahana Godha*



Fig. 1: Difference Between the Iguana with Green Skin-tone (Up) and the Indian Monitor Lizard with Brownish Yellow Skin-Tone (Down) at Trivandrum Zoo; Image Courtesy: Akhileshvv78, Creative Commons License: CC BY-SA 4.0

as the alligator or crocodile-alligator. In India, the crocodile is known as *Makara* in Sanskrit and *Magara* or *Magaramachha* in Hindi. The mugger crocodile, *Crocodylus palustris*, is found dwelling in the freshwater habitats of the Indian subcontinent and Southern Iran. In Indian religion, the animal crocodile is associated with the river goddess *Ganga*, the *Rigvedic* deity *Varuna* and his consort *Varunani* or *Varuni* who preside over the ocean.

The text, *Charaka Samhita* not only differentiated the *Godha* as burrow-dwelling animals from other aquatic animals, but it also classified different varieties of aquatic animals which are often misidentified as the *Makara*, such as the *Shishumara* (estuarine crocodile), the *Kumbheera* (crocodile), the *Chuluki* (Gangetic dolphins) and the *Makara* (great Indian crocodile) (Mehta 1949: 183-184; Van Loon 2002: 249).

In the sculptural medium, the points of difference in the portrayals of the *vahana Godha* and the *vahana Makara* can be noted in the depiction of body lengths, facial features, body cover and the tail or the lower part. The *makara* is majorly shown with an open mouth, sharp teeth, proportionate head with body and wavy lower part. On the other hand, the *Godha* is principally shown with a closed mouth, conical and smaller head in the proportion of the body, dots and scales between the neck and the back, and smooth tail without spurs. The architectural treaties of Early India have also noted these physical differences, particularly concerning the faces of these two varieties of reptiles. The *makara* motif and *makara-torana* in the Asian architectural traditions have a long history of development (Ranasinghe 1991: 132-145), whereas the face of *Godha* was used in a different context in the *Arthashastra* (Singh 1983: 2.2.31). The *Gopuram* with the face

of *Godha*, possibly indicating a conical dimension, was used in reference to an entryway to the city in the *Arthashastra*.

“tribahagagodhamukham gopuram karayet”

-the entrance into the fort through *Gopuram*, an elaborate structure of entryway built above the earth, three-fourth of which should resemble the face of a *Godha* (Bhattacharyya 1948: 76).

The visual resemblance of the *vahana* *Makara* of *Ganga* and the *vahana* *Godha* of *Parvati* in the sculptural medium confused previous scholars, possibly due to the less noted textual references of connection between these two goddesses as sisters and co-wives. The *Ramayana* mentions goddess *Ganga* as the elder and *Parvati* as the younger daughter of *Himavat* (*Ramayana* I. 36, 13 ff), but this connection was modified elsewhere (*Harivamsa* vv. 940 ff) (Muir 1873: 301-302). Hence it can be argued that the *makara* or crocodile with a bigger dimension was regarded as the *vahana* of the elder sister, river goddess *Ganga* and the *vahana* *Godha* or lizard of smaller dimension and resembling features was regarded as the *vahana* of the younger sister, the mountain goddess *Parvati*. *Ganga* and *Gauri* are also noted in the scriptures as two wives of *Shiva*. Later texts like *Skanda Purana* referred to *Ganga* as the wife of *Shiva* who should be considered as a manifestation of *Parvati* (*Kashi-Khanda* of *Skanda Purana*, Chapter 27: 182-84, Eck 1998: 147-148). However, the distinct and separate identities of goddesses *Ganga* and *Parvati* are deeply rooted in the Indian religious tradition. In the images of *Shiva* as *Nataraja* from Sankarbandha and Rampal in Bangladesh, dated to 11th and 12th century CE, both housed in Bangladesh National Museum in Dhaka, the two wives, *Ganga* with the *vahana* *makara* and *Parvati* with the *vahana* *Simha* are portrayed (Bhattasali 1929: 112-113). The difference and rivalry of the co-wives, *Ganga* and *Parvati*, seeking courtship of *Shiva*, became the theme of the celebrated medieval Sanskrit text, *Ganga-Lahari* by Jagannath Pandit datable to the 17th century CE (Eck 1998: 147-148). The familial connections do not eliminate the differences between the two *vahanas* carrying separate symbolic values.

The author would like to draw further attention to these physical differences using iconometric parameters. The proportions of the *vahana* *Makara* were contrasted with the *vahana* *Godha* in a number of images.³ The basis of comparison was the ratio of the body-height of the goddess versus the body-length of the *vahana*. The study shows that *makara* in images of *Ganga* including the lower part of the body measures approximately one and a half in fraction (1/2) of the body-height of the goddess. The *Godha* appears to occupy approximately one and third to one and five in fraction (1/3 to 1/5) of the body height of the goddess. This exercise clarifies that definite markers were used in Indian art, to maintain the difference between *Godha* and *Makara*. Hence, one should be more careful to avoid casual linking between these two different reptiles in Indian art and iconography.

The differences in the religious ranks and the respective *vahanas* of *Parvati* and *Ganga* (often seen as attending goddesses in Hindu or *Shiva* temples, see Pal 1988: 45a-b, 46) can also be highlighted here, for example, in the metal altarpiece, datable to the 8th-10th century CE, presently housed in the Mahant Ghasidas Samarak Sangrahalay, Raipur, Chattishgarh (accession no. 15). Here, the goddess *Parvati* is shown attended by the goddesses *Ganga* with alligator-crocodile and *Yamuna* with tortoise.

D) *Godha*: the Indian monitor lizard

A clear sense that the *Godha* denotes the monitor lizard can be located in the early text, *Charaka Samhita*. It informed that the *Godha* or the monitor lizard lives in the burrows (*Bhumisaya*) and distinguished it from other terrestrial animals of the dry-land forest (*Jangala*), animals that move on waters (*Ambucharin*), animals that live in marshy lands (*Anupa-marga*), animals that live in water (*Varisaya*), and animals that take their food by snatching (*Prasaha*) or birds (Van Loon 2002: 244-248). Based on habitat, this text has categorised the *Godha* alongside *Bheka* (frog), *Svaavid* (porcupine), *Gandaka* (gecko), *Shasha* (rabbits), *Nakula* (mongoose), and *Kadali* (marmot) (Mehta 1949: 184; Van Loon 2002: 244-248). Further information on the zoological and ecological features can be gleaned from the text, the *Sushruta Samhita*, which classified the *Godha* alongside the terrestrial animals with a sub-group of hole-dwellers or burrow-dwellers as *Vileshaya* (Bhishagratna 1907: 485). The *Godha Jatakas* further direct us towards the identification as monitor lizard. The text, *Bhojanakutuhala*, dated to the 17th century CE, classified the edible animals in three divisions, terrestrial (*Bhuchara*), celestial (*Khechara*) and aquatic (*Apchara*), and it classified *Godha* alongside *Nakula* (mongoose) and others in the terrestrial division of meat. From these references and sculptural depictions (particularly Fig. 1 in the present paper), it becomes clear that *Godha* or the monitor lizard was a terricolous animal, dwelling in the forest and hills.

The Indian monitor lizard of family *Varanidae* of genus *Varanus* exploits a wide diversity of ecological specializations including arboreal, semi-aquatic and terrestrial (Murthy 1990: 42-43) which explains the range in the depiction of the *Godha* in the images from different parts of the Indian subcontinent. Four identified species of the Indian monitor lizard are noted: *Varanus bengalensis*, *Varanus flavescens*, *Varanus salvator* and *Varanus griseus* (Murthy 1990: 42-43). The varied body and size in the sculptural depictions of *Godha* might have indicated the different species of *Varanus*. The commonly seen species, *Varanus bengalensis* or the Bengal Monitor, might have been a prominent source for the visual depictions. *Varanus salvator* or the water monitor can grow into an obese size which may explain the bulky representations of the *Godha* in sculptures. The yellow monitor, *Varanus flavescens*, known for its golden yellow skin, presently called *Sun Gohoro* in Nepali and *Sangoih* in Maithili, possibly served as the reference to *Godhika* in the *Samuttaya Nikaya* and *Swarna Godhika* in the Bengali text, *Mangalachandir Geet*. As tree climbers, *Varanus bengalensis* or the Bengal monitor can raise the upper part of the body in upward posture, a feature majorly noticed in several sculptural depictions of *Godha*, looking up towards the goddess (Fig. 2). This posture is also commonly noticed in another allied species, *Varanus nebulosus*, seen in different parts of Southeast Asia.

Recent studies have shown that the Bengal monitor generally takes shelter in the burrows or tree-hollows and is found mostly in the forested areas of the lower elevation (Auffenberg 1994: 103-118, 138-145), whereas the yellow monitor prefers high ground covers, agricultural lands and foothills (Ghimire and Shah 2014: 387-393). The Bengal monitor is commonly noticed in the hilly forests of the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand and is referred to as the *Gola*; however, their number is recently decreasing. Both the Bengal monitor and the yellow monitor are noticed in Nepal. Therefore, the Himalayan foothills and forest, noted in allegory to *Parvati*, *Himavati*, *Gauri-Kund*, is one of the preferred ecological zones and habitats of the Indian monitor lizards. Thus, it becomes



Fig. 2: Goddess Parvati-Gauri During Penance, 6th-7th century CE, Naghal Tole, Presently in National Museum of Nepal, Kathmandu, Image Copyright: wisdomlib.org, License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.

clear that ecology and environment were impactful behind the allegory and symbolism of *Godha* in the texts and icons.

In light of the above observations, it can be argued that the iguana for the term *Godha* is completely misleading. Iguana is noticed only in the American Continent and the Indian subcontinent does not fall within its habitat. The usage of narrowed-down meaning for *Godha* as iguana or alligator in the academic writings of the 20th century is misdirected, likely unintentionally. It might have resulted from the unfamiliarity of the western scholars with Indian monitor lizards. Why the scholars in the 20th century did not see it essential to correspond the animal *Godha* of Indian texts and the actual animal from India in their academic discussions is a question that can not be answered yet. Majority of those works have not included the bionomical species name of iguana while referring to *Godha* or *Godhika*.

Meat, Medicine and Offering of the Body: *Godha* and *Godhika* in Literature and Archaeological Record

It was found that meat and the body of this reptile have been the vital points of the 'gaze', around which the references to the *Godha* were incorporated, reconfigured and modified in the textual discourses and visual culture.

A) In the Brahmanical texts

A number of references, centring on the meat and the body of the *Godha* and *Godhika*, can be located in the early Indian texts including the *Vedic Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Smritis* and the *Dharmashastras* (Lüders 1942: 23-50). An interesting position can be viewed in the *Manusmṛiti*, in the section describing the items of foods and possessions (Chapter XII: 64). In this section, it has been mentioned that a person would be reborn as a *Ghoda* for the punishment of stealing a cow in the previous life (Jha 1939: 470; Bhatt 1992: 400). In ancient India, the cow was perhaps a commonly noticed and prized animal. This

particular reference of *Manusmriti* disparaged and taunted the reptile *Godha* or the monitor lizard, which is hunted and killed for its flesh.

The consumptive and medicinal value of the meat of the *Godha* has been repeatedly quoted in the early and medieval Indian texts. The *Charaka Samhita*, datable between the 2nd century BCE to 1st century CE, in the classification of foods and drinks grouped the *Godha* alongside the animals of *mamshavarga* (edible flesh) group of meat, useful for the *Ayurvedic* practices (Mehta 1949: 182-184). The meat of *Godha* is considered as *madhura* (sweet) in *vipaka* (digestion), and *kashaya* and *katu* (bitter) in *rasa* (taste) in this text (Van Loon 2002: 241, 244). Its meat was considered to alleviate body-strength and enzymes and was advocated for people with good digestive capacity (Mehta 1949: 184, Van Loon 2002: 244). The meat of *Godha* was noted as the best among the terricolous animals (those who live on the ground under the soil cover) and compared with *Rohita* fish (*Labeo rohita*) and purified butter (Mehta 1949: 153) for nutrition-value. As gruel, the meat-juice of *Godha* is noted as a wholesome diet (Mehta 1949: 638) and useful for the treatment of bone and joint pains (Mehta 1949: 673). In the case of snake bites, the blood of *Godha* is believed to be very useful (Mehta 1949: 801).

The *Sushruta Samhita*, datable between the 1st century BCE to 6th century CE, mentioned the meat of *Godha* on several occasions while prescribing its consumption for treatment of hiccup, glandular swellings, eye diseases, and snake and insect bites (Bhishagratna 1907, 1911, 1916). This text identified *Godha* in the group of terrestrial animals whose meat is edible (Bhishagratna 1911: 695). It mentioned that the flesh of the *Godha* is sweet of digestion and has a pungent, astringent taste and it is constructive as a tonic for pacifying the *Vata* and *Pittam* (nature of roughness and cough in the body) (Bhishagratna 1907: 485). It also mentioned that a desire for the flesh of a *Godha* by a pregnant woman indicates the presence of a sleepy, drowsy person in her womb who would be tenaciously fond of good things in life (Bhishagratna 1911: 139). It further advised digestive precautions regarding the consumption of meat of the *Godha* (Bhishagratna 1907: 185, 188, 202).

In the *Dharmasutras*, composed between 300-400 CE, five animals including the reptile *Godha* are exempted from the list of other non-edible five-nailed animals because of their edible meat (van der Geer 2008: 23-24). These animals with edible meat are identified by van der Geer (2008: 24) as *Shvavidh* (porcupine), *Shalyaka* (hedgehog), *Shasha* (pangolin/hare), *Kachchhapa* (the tortoise/the turtle) and *Godha* (the monitor lizard).

The text *Bhojanakutuhala*, dated to the 17th century CE, composed by *Raghunatha Ganesha Navahasta*, the Brahmin scholar from Maharashtra, refers to the high quality of the meat of *Godha* and also presents causation of consumption regarding indigestion (Sreeja 2016: 74). The above textual references, dated between 200 BCE to 1700 CE, direct to the long-standing value of the meat of *Godha* for consumption and medicinal treatments in society.

B) In the Buddhist texts

The references to *Godha* and *Godhika* in the Buddhist literature, where the *Godha* appears majorly as a burrow-dwelling animal, provide insight into its connection with the human world. Four different *Jatakas* as *Godha-Jataka*, in the collection of *Jatakas*

representing a time-period between the 5th century BCE and 2nd century BCE, where the *Buddha* as *Bodhisattva* was noted to be born as *Godha* in his previous births, are known to us. In the compilation by Cowell, these are Jataka no. 138 (Cowell 1895: 297-298), Jataka no. 141 (Cowell 1895: 302-303), Jataka no. 325 (Cowell 1897: 56-58) and Jataka no. 333 (Cowell 1897: 107-109). Furthermore, the *Godha-Jataka* (*Jataka* of the lizard) of the *Mahavastu*, datable between the 2nd century BCE and 4th century CE, contains a similar tale as the *Jataka* no. 333, mentioned above, with a slight variation (Chapter V, Jones 1952: 61-64). The protagonists were altered from the prince and princess of *Venaras* to a merchant couple in the *Mahavastu* version.

In addition to forest, burrows near riverbanks, ant-heaps or anthills are noted as its habitat, away from the human habitations. The *Godha* could grow strong and bulky (*Jataka* no. 141 of the *Jatakamala* and *Godha-Jataka* in the *Mahavastu*). They are noted of having bigger dimensions than the chameleon (*Jataka* no. 141) and sometimes with an uneven body cover.

These references in the Jatakas illustrate that the word *Godha* stood for a type of large lizard whose meat was a prized item. It is interesting to note that in all of the Jatakas, the focus was on the meat, flesh and body of the *Godha*. The Jataka nos. 138, 325 and 333 praise the savoury meat of *Godha* and mentioned that it was often offered to the hermits, ascetics and traveling rich merchants by the common folk. The Jataka nos. 138, 325 and 333 give insight into the cooking preparation of the meat of *Godha* and also about the storage of its meat. Moreover, in these references, some passages point out social prejudices about the consumption of the meat of *Godha*. In the *Mahavastu* (Chapter V, Jones 1952: 61-64), when the *Godha* was lying dead on the doorstep, the princess, wife of the Bodhisattva, would not touch the lizard with her hands. When the prince asked his wife why she did not cook it, the princess replied that she accounted it no better than cow-dung. The young prince then informed that the meat of *Godha* is not uneatable; men eat it. Then he had skinned and cooked it (on fire) and hung it on the branch of the tree. In Jataka no. 138, when the villagers offered its meat prepared with vinegar and sugar to an ascetic, he was unfamiliar with the taste and edibility of the meat of *Godha* (Cowell 1895: 297). Such passages show that there existed some about of unfamiliarity about the edible value of the non-domesticated reptile in a certain sector of the society in the early eras of the first millennium. However, upon cooking or consuming, the meat was highly praised.

The Jataka nos. 138 and 141 give us detailed descriptions of how this animal was hunted for the savoury quality of the meat. The Jataka no. 138 refers, due to the unexpected rains, in the dry seasons, the ants would come out of the ant-hills and the *Godhas* would gather to eat the ants and would get caught by the villagers. In addition, Jataka no. 141 (Cowell 1895: 303) presents a more elucidating note on hunting. The 'trappers'⁴ hunted this animal with spade and dogs in the forests. The ideal weather to hunt this reptile was a summer day after the thunderstorm. The hunter was approached by the protagonist of the tale to locate the burrow with hundreds of *Godhas*. The opening of the burrow on the ground was filled with fuel (brushwood in this case). With the help of fire, the *Godhas* were smoked out of the underground. When the *Godhas* came out on the ground, they were struck by a big stick and the dogs would assist in their capturing.

Connected with these references on meat, diet and capturing of this reptile for consumption, an engaging passage about the self-immolation of the monk *Godhika* who

sacrificed his life in the *Samutta-nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka* (Chapter I: 120-123, Conze 1995: 42-43) can be cited here. This allegorical tale illustrated the Buddha's teaching on suicide and the attainment of the *Nirvana*. The tale refers to the monk, venerable *Godhika*, who lived and meditated on the mount *Isigili* at *Rajagriha* or the present-day Rajgir in seclusion to achieve enlightenment. Upon failing six times, he finally ended his own life. Buddha upon visiting the spot of suicide with his entourage explained to his disciples that the monk *Godhika* practiced meditation with steadfastness and ended his life without the lust for being alive and, as a result, he had attained complete *Nirvana* (Conze 1995: 42-43). It is important to note that the name '*Godhika*' has been used here for the monk to note the lesson on suicide and the achievement of liberation which can be interpreted as a glorification of the self-immolation of animal *Godhika*, an object of consumption, for the greater good of society and humans. Moreover, the dwelling place of the venerable *Godhika* was noted as a secluded mountain-cave, away from the human habitation, possibly serving as an allegory for the natural habitat of the *Godhika*. It is interesting to note that none of the above references in the Buddhist literature depict the *Bodhisattva* or any Buddhist engaged in killing or causing to kill the *Godha*. To avoid any indication of animal-killing and torturing, the *Mahavastu* narration mentions the *Godha* was killed by a cat and thereafter left on the doorsteps of the prince. The princess did not commit the killing (Jones 1952: 61-64). Thus, the Buddhist perspective on this animal represents a dichotomy. On one hand, it incorporated and applauded the consumptive value of *Godha*, while on the other hand, it bypassed any connection to the killing or hunting of this animal.

C) Archaeozoology and ethnographic loci

The textual references on the hunting and consumption of *Godha*, the monitor lizard, can be corroborated by archaeozoological data from a number of sites. The skeletal elements of a species of monitor lizard were noted from the Mesolithic rock-shelter at Adamgarh, Madhya Pradesh (Sahu 1988: 93). A prehistoric painting in the rock shelter at the site of Jaora near Bhimbetka in Central India, dated to the Mesolithic period, shows a hunter with a bow and arrows, walking with a basket or net carrying carcasses of a cow, deer, monkey, a small ruminant, monitor lizard and one big and four small-sized rats as part of his hunt, likely symbolising hunter's wish of catching all the animals as his day's hunt (Sathe 2017: 11, Fig.2). This shows that this animal was part of the hunting-gathering-based subsistence from the Mesolithic period onwards. In northern India, from the site of Tokwa in Uttar Pradesh, the Neolithic cultural layer has yielded remains of monitor lizards (Joglekar et al. 2008: 51). In southern India, Neolithic ash-mounds have yielded faunal remains of monitor lizards including the sites of Kodekal (Sahu 1988: 193) and Banahalli (Paddayya 2004-2005: 36) in Karnataka. Sites associated with Iron-Age to Early Historic transition period, inhabited by hunting-gathering and agro-pastoral communities, such as Kanavaypatti in Tamil Nadu (Selvakumar 2002: 91, Table 5) and Kadebakele in northern Karnataka (Bauer et al. 2007: 17, Table 1) have yielded remains of monitor lizards in the faunal assemblage alongside other wild non-mammalian species, associated with food economy. In the chalcolithic cultural period, this animal formed a part of wild fauna exploited in a number of archaeological sites, such as Bagor

in Rajasthan (IAR 1967-68: 42), Balathal (Joglekar and Testo 2017: 188) in Rajasthan and Bara in Punjab (Sahu 1988: 153).

In the faunal assemblages from Harappan sites, remains of monitor lizards were also found (Sahu 1988: 137). The site of Kanmer in Gujarat, with a Mature Harappan cultural deposit, has yielded faunal remains of monitor lizards among the non-mammal animals. At Madina in Haryana, from the intermediate layers of Late Harappan to Painted Grey Ware using occupations, remains of monitor lizard were noted (Joglekar and Sharada 2016: 228, Table 47). Even in the Early Historic period, this animal was hunted for subsistence as seen in the faunal assemblage from the site of Jokha in Gujarat (Joglekar and Goyal 2015: 192).

Contemporarily, several hunting-gathering communities are engaged in the hunting of monitor lizards among other small games for subsistence, such as the *Kuchapuri Yerukulas*, a semi-nomadic hunting gathering community living in the interiors of Nandyal basin of Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, the *Kanjars* of the Ganga valley and the *Musehars* of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar (Sathe 2017: 1-20). Moreover, communities living on the outskirts of villages are often engaged in capturing and skinning the monitor lizards for selling the meat and skin in the markets. The skin and body parts of the animal are used till present times as medicinal cures as well as for making musical instruments in different parts of India. However, in the upper stratum of Indian society, a taboo prevails regarding the consumption of the meat of this reptile.

Sanctification through Sacred Association: *Godha* and *Godhika* in Religious Art

The *Kalika Purana*, composed between 800-1200 CE, advocated *Godhika* among other animals (birds, tortoise, antelope, alligators) to be sacrificed to please the goddess *Chandika* (Chapter 55: 3, Sastri 1972: 388). The *Mangalchandir Geet*, a regional religious text, datable to 16th century CE, refers to the meat of *Swarna-godhika* as a prized item of consumption (Bhattacharya 1952: 41-63). These references note a gradual process of ritual sanctification of this animal through its incorporation in the religious corpus. Such incorporation might have appropriated the existing value attached with the procurement and consumption of its meat. Let us examine this process of ritual purification of this small reptile and its meat through repetitive visual and textual referencing in the sacred domain between the 7th-16th centuries CE.

The *Godha* is frequently (not necessarily) present as the *vahana* in the images of the *Tapasvini Parvati* or *Parvati-Gauri*, recovered from different regions of the Indian subcontinent (Guy 2019: 322). Goddess *Gauri* in Hinduism is noted as the daughter of *Himavat* (representative of element ether) and *Menaka* (representative of intellect), closely connected with the concept of wisdom and the mountains (Muir 1873: 301-302). The *Agni Purana* mentioned that *Godha* is the *vahana* of the goddess *Gauri* (Chapter 50: 13b-15; Chapter 52: 15; Picron 1980: 282, 299). The reference occurring in the *Agni Purana* was used later in the Medieval texts like *Rupamandana* to refer to the worship of *Gauri* in the household, indirectly associating the *Godha* with the prospect of the prosperity of the household (Rao 1914, appendix C: 113,120; Bhattasali 1929: 199-200; Haque and Bhattacharya 2000: 181). *Siddha*, *Rambha* and *Lalita* are the other prominent sculptural representations of the ascetic iconographic form of the great goddess where the *Godha* is often present (Picron 1980: 282-302).

A) Early depictions of the *Godha*, A Visual Metaphor

The origin and rise of the cult of goddess *Gauri* are beyond the scope of the present paper. Guy (2019: 317-336) has highlighted the possible existence of the cult of goddess *Gauri* as a protective deity from reptiles, before the Puranic appropriation. The present study begins the examination only in the context of proper representation of *Godha* as the *vahana* of goddess *Gauri*, as instructed in the Puranic literature. The iconic images of *Parvati-Gauri* performing penance with the *vahana Godha* are chiefly noticeable in the post-Gupta period from the 7th century CE onwards⁵ (Picron 1980: 282-302; Trivedi 1981; Deva 1983: 1-4; Jayaswal 1989: 183-186; Haque 1992; Joshi 1996a, 1996b; Akhouri 1998: 98-100; Rahman 1998; Bautze-Picron and Sanyal 2018: 215-236; Mevissen 2019: 191-256). An early example of the text-instructed iconography of *Godhasana Bhaved Gauri* or *Gauri* with the *vahana Godha*, in visual mode, can be seen on the east wall of cave no. 23 at Ellora. In this single panel-depiction, the goddess is shown with two arms and *Jatamukuta*, encircled by *Agnikundins* and accompanied by the *vahana Godha* on the pedestal.

Apart from the iconic images, the visual narrative panels of *Parvati-Gauri* also include the *Godha*. The texts such as the *Vishnudharmottara Purana* have noted *Gauri* as the maiden goddess associated with the mountains (Rao 1914: 360; Chakravarty 1970: 201). The narrative was popularised by the elucidate description of *Kalidasa* in the *Kumarasambhavam* (Chapter V: 23, Chakravarty 1970: 202). In the early narratives with forested and hilly environs, the representations of *Godha* also appear to be more naturalistic. The author highlights the stone panel, recovered from Naghal Tole in Nepal, datable between the 6th to 7th century CE and presently kept in the National Museum of Nepal (Fig. 2). It shows *Parvati* in garments of leaves, performing *Tapas* (austerities) amidst hills and forest, rejecting food brought in by one of the female attendants while an antelope with hooved feet chews on leaves from the tree (on the proper right side). The *Godha* with its conical mouth and bulky body is shown on the proper left as escaping in-between the folds of the hills. The two trees of mountain fauna allure the flanks of this panel. The wild environmental setting where the goddess performed penance is communicated by a careful and combined arrangement of trees, antelopes and the *Godha*, adding to the vividness and vitality of the forest and hills. As this panel speaks, the *vahana Godha* becomes a reference to the hilly and forested areas where goddess *Parvati* performed austerities (*tapas*) to acquire *Shiva* as a husband in the early images of *Parvati-Gauri*.

In Indian folk tradition, it is said that the jaws of monitor lizards are so strong that once they bite into something, it is very difficult to let them go of it. These early visual depictions of the reptile can be taken as resonating the steadfastness of *Parvati* in penance, adamant and unstoppable in her goal for approval of marriage from *Shiva*. The *Godha* in these early depictions also denoted a sense that it is rare to spot this shy reptile, and through such exposition mirrored the entity of *Parvati*, performing penance in seclusion away from the human habitation.

Moreover, the visual notation of *Godha* or *Godhika* as a *vahana* of *Parvati-Gauri* possibly also denoted a literal simile. The goddess *Parvati-Gauri* is noted in the scriptures to have performed austerities and penance (*tapas*) on different occasions, such as to persuade *Shiva* for marriage and also to transform the dark tone of the skin into fair

(hence the name *Gauri* or the golden one) (Mevisen 2019: 192). The species, *Varanus flavescens* or the yellow monitor lizard in India, is known as *Swarna-Godhika* in Bengali, *Sun-Gohoro* in Nepali and *Songoih* in Maithili. The incorporation of the *Godha* with *Parvati-Gauri* specifically in the scenes of austerity-performance implies a visual metaphor. This association connects a non-domestic reptile whose existence was being acknowledged with a female deity of the mountains who was aiming for acceptance and validation through austerities.

B) Types, illustrations and examples of the depictions of *Godha*

With time, more narrative elements were added to the iconic images of *Parvati* performing penance (shown in Figs. 3 and 4). In the comparatively later images of



Fig. 3: Goddess *Gauri* standing on *Godha*, 9th Century CE, Image Courtesy and Copyright: Museum Associates, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Accession No.M.82.226; Image in Public Domain



Fig. 4: Goddess *Gauri* with *Godha* on Pedestal, 10th Century CE, Image Courtesy and Copyright: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession No.2014.519; Image in Public Domain

Parvati-Gauri, seen from 9th-10th century CE, three animals are generally noticed within the stele, the lion, the antelope(s) and the lizard. The lion and the antelope(s) are generally shown above the pedestal (zone C) and the lizard is mainly shown on the pedestal (zone D), either directly below the feet of the goddess or on either of the sides (with a few exceptions such as the *Rambha* image in the National Museum, New Delhi, accession no.1706/68). In these advanced and modified visual scheme, the positioning of *Godha* beneath the feet of the goddess can be taken as suggestive of the terrestrial nature of the lion and antelope(s) and the terricolous nature of the lizard.

The figuration and dimensions of *Godha* in the standardised iconic image of *Parvati-Gauri* are not uniform. These variations can be taken as suggestive of the actual variety of size and species of the Indian monitor lizard, as viewed by contemporary people and artists. These can also be representative of the existing social and religious perceptions about the animal *Godha*.

Based on the examination of several images, a few distinct variations in the figures of *Godha* are noted in Fig. 5. To elaborate more on these varied types of figurations of *Godha*, few examples are given below.

Fig.5.a: Two metal images of *Parvati-Gauri*, Nalanda Site Museum; The image of *Siddha* in Ashmolean Museum, Oxford inv. EAOS104; The image of *Gauri* from Arial⁶ in the Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, accession number 17 (Bhattachali 1929: 202, 273)

Fig.5.b: Two-armed image of *Parvati-Gauri* on the east wall of the cave no.23 at Ellora; The *Gauri* image from Shamlaji in Gujarat

Fig.5.c: Two armed *Gauri* images⁷ from Karimnagar / Asifnagar, Andhra Pradesh State Museum, Hyderabad; The *Gauri* image in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no.2014.519 (Fig. no. 4 in the present paper)

Fig.5.d: Fragmented image of *Parvati-Gauri* from Agradigun, Bangladesh, presently in Asutosh Museum, Kolkata, accession no. 629; 2002-1282 / 21231 (Mevissen 2019: 211); Four-armed image of *Gauri* from unknown Provenance in Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh, accession no. I-89.2624 (Mevissen 2019: 202, Fig.12); Image of *Gauri* (*Lalita*) from Ramgaon, in Varendra Research Museum, accession no. 273; Fragmented image of *Parvati* (*Siddha*) from Singhol, Begusarai (Bautze-Picron and Sanyal 2018: 225, Plate 14.25)

Fig.5.e: Four-armed *Parvati* (*Lalita*) image on the exterior of Surya temple, Badgaon, Nalanda, Bihar; Four armed of *Parvati-Gauri* from Atkheda, Madhya Pradesh (Joshi 1996b: Fig. 22); Four-armed image stone image at Majhgaon, Jharkhand (Ray 1915: Fig. 9)

Fig.5.f: Two *Parvati-Gauri* images from Chhatarpur, Khajuraho, presently housed in Khajuraho Archaeological Museum⁸; Image of *Gauri* in Ashmolean Museum, Oxford inv. EA1999.21; Another variation of this type can be noted in the *Gauri* image in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, accession no. M.82.226, where the neck is further elongated (see Fig. 3 in this paper).

Fig.5.g: A number of the *Parvati* images from Hinglajgarh⁹ in Mandasore, Madhya Pradesh and Rani-ka-bhav in Patan, Gujarat; this particular type is comparable to type 5.f but the animal has a bulkier body in this type and is sometimes shown as entangled in the lotus-stalks¹⁰ (see Fig. 6 in this paper).

Fig.5.h: The *Parvati-Gauri* (*Lalita* form) images recovered from North Bengal and Bangladesh of the late 11th century and post-11th century CE date; Image of *Gauri* (*Lalita* form) in Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, accession no. 66.35; Image of *Gauri* from Chapail, Rajshahi in Varendra Research Museum, accession no. 71; Image of *Gauri* from Bankishore, Rajshahi in Varendra Research Museum, accession no.206; this particular type is comparable to type 5.d but represents a further developed form.

Further research on the *vahana* *Godha* in the *Parvati-Gauri* images can offer more variations and examples.

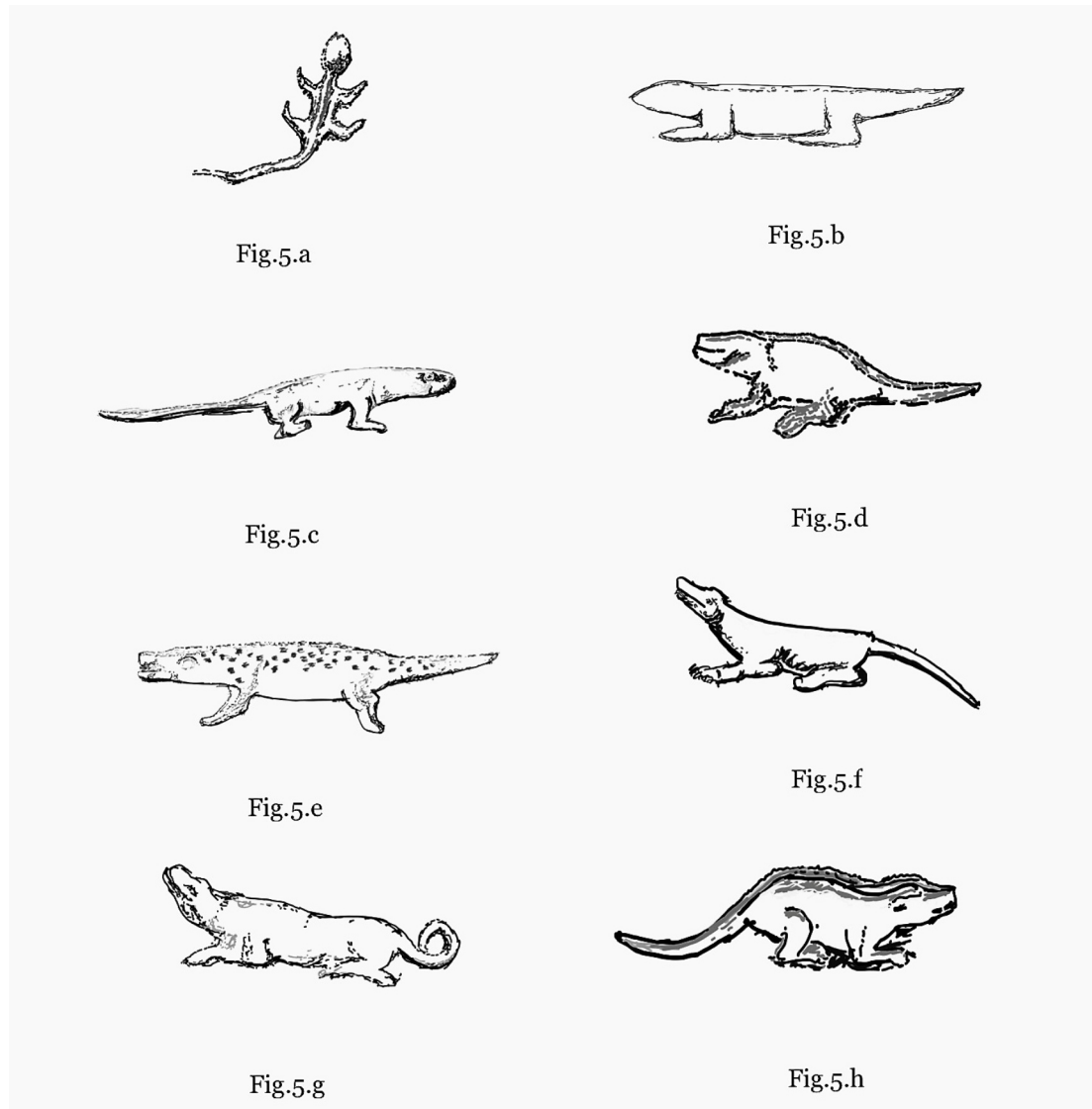


Fig. 5.a-h: Different Types of 'Godha' seen in the Images of *Parvati-Gauri*; Sketch by the author

C) Stylistic change in the later depictions of *Godha*

Among the above noted variations, considerable differences can be seen in the figuration of the *Godha* between (a) 7th to 10th century CE (Figs. 5.a, 5.b, 5.c and 5.e) and (b) Late 10th to 11th century CE and onwards (Figs. 5.d, 5.f, 5.g and Fig.5.h). The realistic

figuration of *Godha* was gradually replaced by a bulkier and squeezed depiction, acting almost on a metaphorical level. This reduction in the body length and increase in body size in the comparatively later images evoked a sense of similarity of the *Godha* with the mongoose (Bhattachali 1929: 200; Picron 1980: 300). Bhattachali (1929: 200) has commented that these mongoose-like representations of the *vahana* were due to the apparent ignorance of the sculptor. The *Nakula* or mongoose was often classified in the texts like *Charaka Samhita* alongside *Godha* as a burrow-dwelling animal and as a source of edible and nutritious meat. In Indian religion, as the *vahana* of *Kubera*, the Hindu god of wealth, the mongoose is considered as representative of prosperity. In Indian traditions, the mongoose is considered a keeper of the wellbeing of the household. Hence, the figurative similarity between *Nakula* and *Godha* in the sculptural medium might have been suggestive and intentional and not a mistake as explored in this part of the paper.

This change in the depiction of *Godha* can be noticed in several *Parvati* images from Western India (Chittorgarh in Rajasthan and Patan in Gujarat), Central India (Khajuraho), West Bengal and Bangladesh. Fig. 6 in this paper demonstrates this bulky figuration of the *Godha* entrapped in lotus stalks on the pedestal of the *Parvati-Gauri* image from Hingalajgarh, Madhya Pradesh, presently housed in the State Museum, Bhopal. It follows stylistic attributes seen in the *Paramara* style of art and can be dated between the late 11th to the 12th century CE. The image of *Lalita* form of *Parvati* from Bangladesh (Fig. 7) includes another example of this evolved depiction of a bulkier and squeezed version of the *Godha*, generally seen in *Parvati* images from West Bengal and Bangladesh.

This squeezed depiction of *Godha*, under the feet of *Parvati*, looking upwards to the divine couple of *Shiva* and *Parvati* in a narrative panel at the *Hoysala* temples at Halebid and Nuggihalli, Karnataka were mistaken by van der Geer (2008: 299) as the animal otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*). Expressing confusion and similarity with a reptile, he commented that the limb-postures of the depicted animal can be taken as characteristic of a mammalian. A comparison of the limbs of *Godha* as represented in the later images recovered from the Western, Central and Eastern India sets the record straight, pointing out that the animal depicted is a squeezed and bulky variation of *Godha*, the monitor lizard, and not the otter. Moreover, the present author could not locate any available textual reference to the otter in association with *Parvati*.

D) A response to the Medieval religious processes and changing purview on *Godha*:

These variations (and non-standardization) in depictions of *Godha* can be explored by accounting for the evolving nature of the cult of goddess *Gauri* from the 7th century to 13th century CE and thereafter. In Jainism, goddess *Gauri* came to be prominently venerated as a *Vidyadevi* (Bhattacharya 1974: 126). The Buddhist texts, *Sadhanamala* and *Nispannayogavali*, recognised eight female deities of the *Gauri* group in *Mandala* ensemble (Bhattacharyya 1958: 309-312). The cult of *Gauri* thrived further in the early medieval period by subsuming the vibrancy of Shaktism as a religious force. The medieval texts and iconographic treatises such as *Aparajitapriccha*, *Diparnava*, *Devatamurtiprakarana* and *Rupamandana* glorified the goddess *Gauri* on *vahana* *Godha* (Misra 1985: 99). In Gujarat and Rajasthan, several religious texts by Jain scholars, such as the *Nirvanakaila* (composed by *Padalipta Suri*, dated to the 11th century CE) and the



Fig. 6: Classic Example of *Gauri* Image with *Godha* entangled in Lotus Stalk, 11-12th century CE, From Hingalajgarh (Mandasore) in State Museum, Bhopal; Image Courtesy: Suyash Dwivedi, Creative Commons License: CC BY-SA 4.0



Fig. 7: Goddess Lalita (Parvati) standing on a lotus with the bulkier *Godha*, depicted below her feet, from Manda, Naogon, Bangladesh, Image after Banglapedia (2003: Fig.17), Courtesy: Sirajul Islam

Pratisthasaroddhara (composed by *Asadhara*, dated to the 13th century CE), glorified goddess *Gauri* for granting boons and bringing material welfare through the epithets like *Godhavahanam* or *Godhagata* (Bhattacharya 1974: 128). The iconographic treaty, *Devatamurtiprakarana* and *Rupamandana*, composed by *Sutradhara Mandana*, under the patronage of *Maharana Kumbha*, datable to the 15th century CE, clearly noted,

‘*Aksasutram tatha Padmamabhayam Chavaram tatha
Godhasanasrita murtirgrihe pujya Sriye Sada*’

-that the worship of *Gauri* on *vahana Godha* in the household shrine is recommended for maintaining consistent household prosperity (Rao 1914: Appendix C: 117-120; Banerjee 1956: 501-502). Moreover, in the *Lalita* and *Uma* variety of the *Parvati-Gauri* images, the portrayal of the goddess accompanied by the *vahana Godha*, included other family members, the husband *Shiva* represented through the *Shiva-Linga* and the two children, *Skanda* and *Ganesha*. One may notice that a prominent association was drawn

to the prosperous family life (Picron 1980: 282-302). Goddess *Gauri* came to be adorned in the role of a wife and a mother, looking after the prosperity and welfare of family and household and no longer as a maiden goddess of the mountains.

It can be argued that these transitions, from a virgin mountain goddess to a deity of household prosperity, passed a strong impact on the depictions of *vahana* of the goddess. With this changing perspective on the deity hood of *Parvati-Gauri*, the *Godha* with its bulky body and obedient posture of looking upwards to the goddess started to signify the concept of material prosperity and household abundance in the images of Parvati from 11th century CE onwards. Closely linked to the transitory role of *Parvati-Gauri*, the religious processes in the medieval period might have taken inspiration from the long persisting social perception about the prized quality of the meat of the *Godha*. It has been discussed above that the texts like *Jatakas*, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Bhojanakutuhala* praised the savoury meat of *Godha* for diet and treatment of various ailments. The procurement and consumption of the prized meat of the *Godha*, an animal rare to sight, indirectly suggest the resourcefulness of the respective household.

In Eastern India, we find an interesting reference to the persisting social ideal on the consumptive values of the meat of *Godhika*, reflected in the religious context. Chakravarti (2011) has highlighted the body of regional literature such as *Upapuranas* and *Mangal Kavyas* in elucidating the process of appropriation of regional goddesses into the pan-India stream of goddess tradition in the medieval period.

References of *Godhika* can be found in two medieval religious texts (*Upapurana*), written in Bengali in praise of goddess Mangalachandi (Bhattacharya 1952: preface), composed in the 16th century CE. Manna (1993: 78) has quoted an important reference from the text *Mangalchandir Geet* in this regard:

*“Bharat Bhumete candilila prakashia,
Kalketu Uddharibe godhika hayiya”*

As *Mangala-Chandika*, she granted a boon and saved *Kalketu* by assuming the form of a *Godhika* which spread her glory in the Indian soils.

These two texts, the *Mangalchandir Geet* by *Dwij Madhava* (Bhattacharya 1952) and the *Chandimangal* by *Kabikankan* (Sen 1993) illustrate the tale of the goddess *Mangalachandi* who took the disguise of a *Godhika* of golden coloured (possibly in reference to the species *Varanus flavescens*) and was entrapped and caught from the forest by the huntsman *Kalketu*, the protagonist of the tale. *Kalketu* is referred to as belonging to the forest-dwelling community, living on the outskirts of the village settlements, and who had caught the *Godha* from the forest with the prospect of selling its meat. However, on the persuasion of the good wife of *Kalketu*, the goddess finally granted a boon that made the protagonist prosper in his life to establish new settlements in Gujarat and thus the worship of this goddess received further patronage. Infiltration into forested territories for establishing new human settlements was a continuous process in ancient and medieval India. It resulted in an interface with the forest-dwelling communities. Particularly in Eastern India, starting from the 700-800 CE till 1500-1600 CE, the autochthonous goddesses and female deities of the forested communities were claimed under the process of religious appropriation and were re-configured as manifestations of the great goddess *Parvati*. Scholars have shown that such processes were deeply

connected with state formation, political legitimation and development of regional cultural identity (Kulke 1993; Chakravarti 2011). In the present case, the reference to the prosperity of a forest-dwelling huntsman with the benevolence of the goddess paints an allegory to the transition in the religious as well as in the material culture during the medieval period.

The connection of *Godha* with goddess *Mangalchandi* and not *Gauri* in these medieval texts appears to be striking. Some scholars have aligned this goddess *Mangalachandi* with the Puranic goddess *Chandika* and *Parvati* and considered the identity as one of the many personifications of *Parvati* (Mukhopadhyaya 1984: 16; Sarkar 2001: 79-80).

On the other side, textual discourses and profusion of iconic images attest that the worship of *Gauri* was popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan during the early medieval period under the *Jaina* patronage. The reference to Gujarat in the medieval Bengali text in reference to goddess *Chandi* who takes the form of *Godha* possibly denotes allied links and supra-regional veneration of goddesses *Chandi* and *Gauri* as personifications of *Parvati*. It also points towards the wider recognition of the *vahana*, *Godha*, in the medieval period. However, the connection between such allied cults needs to be further explored and investigated (Bhattacharya 1952: preface).

Conclusion

The above discussion illustrates that the reptile *Godha* should not be confused with either the iguana or the crocodile-alligator. The textual references, information, assessment and observations in this paper have left little room for doubt about *Godha* denoting the Indian monitor lizard of family *Varanidae* in Indian literature and art.

The present paper has demonstrated that in significance, the reptile *Godha* was much more than a mere minor animal depicted on the images of *Parvati-Gauri*. From prehistoric times till the present, the meat of *Godha* or the monitor lizard has been a well-known source of diet, although more closely associated with hunting-gathering communities. Prevailing notions about this animal in past might have centred on its consumptive values. The reference to this animal in the *Agni Purana* was reconfigured in the Medieval texts like *Rupamandana* to refer to the worship of *Gauri* in the household, indirectly associating the *Godha* with prosperity of the household. The depictions of the *Godha* in the sculptures were receptive to the transitions in the goddess cults and were possibly regulated accordingly, influenced by the value of the meat of the reptile.

The pivot on this animal in the past, centred on its meat, has remained unchanged in modern times. Even today, the monitor lizard is hunted, captured, and tortured for its meat, which is considered a luxurious cuisine in India and other parts of Asia. In addition, the consumption of body parts of the Indian monitor lizard as remedies to different health problems is very much prevalent. Furthermore, the skin of the Indian monitor lizard is exported for leather and used in making musical instruments such as *Kanjira* and *Ghumot*. Habitat destruction, human greed and killings of the Indian monitor lizard, a shy animal of the rare sighting, have caused a severe decrease in its number. More research and awareness are needed for protecting this nearly endangered reptile.

In conclusion, the present study bears an example that different modes of information, when not compartmentalized, can offer us valuable observations. It is

essential that inferences arising from exclusive focus are corroborated, crosschecked and synchronized with available information from disciplines of physical and social sciences. It can apprehend meaningful observations on animals and the past life-ways.

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Notes:

1) The *Godha* is shown with a number of iconographic forms of the goddess with ascetic appearances which have been identified either as *Tapasvini Parvati* or as *Gauri* by previous scholars. *Parvati* and *Gauri* among other titles denote the benign representations of goddess *Durga* (Bhattasali 1929:198). Thus, to avoid confusion, present paper has used the composite term *Parvati-Gauri* to denote the ascetic representation of the great goddess with the *vahana Godha*.

2) <http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Iguana&species=iguana>

3) Image of *Ganga* for this study are from Ahichchhtra in National Museum, New Delhi, accession no.L-2, in Ellora Cave no.21, from Ellora and housed in National Museum, New Delhi, accession no.78-1010 and the image of *Varunani* from Konark Odisha, presently in National Museum, New Delhi, India, accession no.50-179. The *Parvati-Gauri* images are mentioned in the section 5.B in this paper.

4) Cowell has used 'iguana-trappers' (Vol. I, 1985: 303). However, as this study shows iguana is a misidentification for *Godha* and the term denoted is monitor lizard. The author has used only trappers in this case.

5) The fragmentary part of a sandstone image with label, 'Lower part of a lady' in the Indian Museum (accession no.M9/A25021), hailing from Mathura, datable to 5th-6th century CE, shows a small crawling lizard, climbing on the pedestal which resembles a rocky surface. Mukhopadhyay (1966:23-24) has considered it one of the early representations of *Gauri* in *Saptapadi* of the *Kalyana-Sundara* aspect, stepping forward, marked by the *vahana Godhika*. The *Godhika* in other *Kalayana-sundara* murti of *Shiva-Parvati* makes us ponder over the identification.

6) https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/huntington/show_detail.py?ObjectID=14040

7) https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/aiis/aiis_query.py?image_id=ar_016513&get_large=yes

8) https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/aiis/aiis_query.py?image_id=ar_045203&get_large=yes

9) https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/aiis/aiis_query.py?image_id=ar_040080&get_large=yes

10) https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/huntington/show_detail.py?ObjectID=14094

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