
Recently Reported Gajalakshmi Panels from Goa

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Abstract: *This research paper is based on significant findings of recently discovered Gajalakshmi panels from Goa. These panels today are found in temple shrines, villages and forest areas without any shelter and protection. These panels are been worshipped by villagers as their local deity. Some are depicted as statues and bas-reliefs in temples which became the objects of rituals and adoration. Numerous such sculptures are carved in soapstone or basalt are found scattered in different talukas of Goa which has been documented in this paper. This paper puts special emphasis on iconographic features of the panels to properly identify, document, and attempts to give meaning through comparing with other panels found in Goa. It further attempted to date these panels approximately based on iconographic and stylistic grounds to understand the development of iconographical features in the study area of Goa.*

Keywords: Gajalakshmi, Worship, Iconography, Stone, Panel, Goa, Temple

Introduction

Goa has deep-rooted history, and it is evident through several heritage remains scattered around the state. In the state, various archaeological cultural material such as Prehistoric tools, Rock-art, Megalithic burials, Rock-cut caves, Monolithic shrines, Temples, Forts and Fortifications have been recorded from this region. Apart from these, Water tanks, Port walls, Inscriptions, Coins, Sculptures, Memorials etc. are also noted. Which proves it been rich in archaeological remains owing to its geographical conditions. The State of Goa is situated on the West Coast of India and encompasses an area of 3,702 kms. The State is divided into two Districts with twelve Talukas. The two districts are, North and South, with its headquarters at Panaji and Margao respectively. The north district comprises of six talukas, namely Pernem, Bardez, Tiswadi, Bicholim, Ponda and Sattari while the south district comprises of six talukas, namely Mormugao, Salcete, Quepem, Dharbandora, Sanguem and Canacona. Panaji is the capital city of the State. These talukas can be divided into coastal (Pernem, Bardez, Tiswadi, Mormugao and Salcete), midland (Ponda, Bicholim and Quepem) and Western Ghat talukas (Sattari, Dharbandora, Sanguem and Canacona).

For the present research paper, a village to village survey was undertaken in the talukas of Goa using maps and local guidance. Field work and exploration in the villages were necessary to collect the data and recording new findings for the present

research paper. All the panels are photographed and documented along with measurements and other details. Further, regional variations for analytical study of these panels are recorded based on description and observation. Secondly, absence of inscriptional records made it difficult to date these panels. Hence dating in present research paper have been done approximately based on stylistic grounds and understanding the development of iconographical features in the study area.

Panels of Gajalakshmi

The stone panels of Gajalakshmi are locally known as '*Kelbai*', '*Bhauka*' or '*Gajantlakshmi*' and are found in several villages of Goa which are still under worship. In these villages the Goddess is worshipped in an independent shrine as well as *parivara devata*. Gajalakshmi is identified by local names in each taluka of Goa. She is known as *Bhavakadevi* in Ponda and Pernem taluka, *Sateri* in Sattari, *Kelbai* in Bicholim, *Shimradevi* in Pernem, *Mauli* in Pernem and so on. Overall, eighteen panels of Gajalakshmi were newly reported by the researcher during the field work from different villages in the state of Goa (Table 1). The panels reported during the field work are identified and discussed in detail below:

Gajalakshmi Panels from Sattari Taluka: The large size panels were reported from the villages of Advoi, Saleli, Thane and Velus in Sattari taluka. Total twelve panels of Gajalakshmi are being reported from Sattari taluka. The panel of Gajalakshmi from Advoi is worshipped at Shree *Kelbai Prasann* temple in the village of Advoi. The panel is fully ornamented and is divided into three parts. The figure of *kiritimukha* is absent on top (Figure 1). The upper most panel depicts elephants. The middle panel shows warriors, cavalrymen and men riding horses. The lower panel shows men and women dancing and beating the drums and other instruments. Similar panel in size and other features is also reported from Saleli village. The panel is divided into three parts and is worshipped at *Sateri-Kelbai* temple (Figure 2). Another panel is reported from Saleli village is worshipped today at Mahadev Temple. This panel is also divided into three parts depicted large size elephant in the centre seen pouring water over the seated deity (Figure 3). As in the above two panels discussed, lowest panel here depicts the men and women dancing and beating drums and other musical instruments whereas, the middle panel shows warriors, cavalrymen and men riding horses too. Based on stylistic and iconographical features all the above three panels are dated back to c. Fourteen-fifteen century AD approximately.

Another large size panel is reported from Thane village in Sattari taluka which is seen outside the *Sateri* temple (Figure 4). The deity is flanked by two *chauri* bearers and two elephants are seen pouring water over her (*abhishekajal*). She is shown holding two *padma* in hand and in seated posture on a pedestal. On either side of the deity two pillars are shown. One side of the panel is weathered and other side is depicted with men and women dancing and playing instruments. Another panel is also seen placed besides this large panel. The deity depicted on this panel is also in seated posture with two elephants flanked on either side pouring water (*abhishekajal*) on the Goddess

(Figure 5). The elephants shown here are full sized and ornamented with *ghanta* in the neck. The portion below the deity is unoccupied with any figures or designs. The upper portion is shown with men and women figures. Both of these panels are placed outside the Sateri temple and are not in worship today.



Figure 1: Gajalakshmi Panel, Advoi, Sattari taluka



Figure 2: Gajalakshmi Panel, Saleli, Sattari taluka

At Velus village in Sattari taluka two panels are been reported from Ravalnath temple and one from *Sateri Brahmani Mahamaya Prasann* temple. The two panels at Ravalnath temple have similar features though varies in size. These panels are divided into two parts. The lower part depicts the cavalrymen, two horse riders on either side, warriors and other men in dancing posture with drums and other instruments. The upper panel is shown with large size elephant figures moving in force towards the Goddess and pouring water on her (*abhishekajal*). On both the panels, face of the deity is mutilated. The two attendants are also shown on either side (Figures 6 and 7). Both these panels are seen placed outside the temple in the thatched roof along with other deities such as Ganesha, Mahishasurmardini and folk deities. Based on stylistic and iconographical features these panels are dated back to c. Twelfth -Fourteen century AD.



Figure 3: Gajalakshmi Panel, Saleli, Sattari taluka



Figure 4: Gajalakshmi Panel, Thane, Sattari taluka

The panel at *Sateri Brahmani Mahamaya Prasann* temple is worshipped inside the *garbhagriha* of the temple along with other deities. Here the panel is divided into two different parts (Figure 8) As seen on other panels, the lower panel here depicts eight men who are playing musical instruments. The upper panels show deity in a seated posture and besides here two elephants pouring water (*abhishekaja*) over the deity. The deity is well ornamented and the top panel is also seen having decorated border. Here the *kalasa* (water pot) is clearly visible on both sides. This panel is been painted and is currently in worship by locals as *Kelbai*. Based on stylistic and iconographical features these panels are dated back to *c. Fourteen-fifteenth century AD* approximately.



Figure 5: Gajalakshmi Panel, Thane, Sattari taluka



Figure 6: Gajalakshmi Panel, Velus, Sattari taluka



Figure 7: Gajalakshmi Panel, Velus, Sattari taluka



Figure 8: Gajalakshmi Panel, Velus, Sattari taluka



Figure 9: Gajalakshmi Panel, Usap, Bicholim taluka



Figure 10: Gajalakshmi Panel, Kumtal, Sattari taluka

The two panels reported from Kumtal village in Sattari taluka. Both these panels are placed outside *Shree Mahamaya Sateri Prasann* temple. The first panel is divided into two parts. The upper part is broken and not much features are seen (Figure 9). The lower part is shown with a man beating drum on the left side and the right side

another man is shown dancing. The other panel is smaller in size comparatively and a figure of *kiritimukha* is depicted on the top of the deity (Figure 10). The panel is divided into two parts and the lower part is shown with couples dancing and beating drums on the either side. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Thirteenth -Fifteenth century AD approximately.



Figure 11: Gajalakshmi Panel, Kumtal, Sattari taluka

The other panels reported from Sattari taluka are from Ponsuli and Pali villages. At Ponsuli village, the panel is seen outside an old temple structure at *Shree Sateri Kelbai Brahmani Prasann*. Here the panel is placed along with other deities such as Betal, Mahishasurmardini and Brahmanimaya. The Goddess depicted on panel is fully ornamented and seen seated on a pedestal (Figure 11). The two elephants are pouring water (*abhishekajal*) on the deity and two riders are seen riding them. The lower panel is shown with dancers on either side. The figure of *kiritimukha* is absent. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Thirteenth -Fifteenth century AD approximately. At Pali village, two paneled Gajalakshmi is carved out of a schist stone. This panel is placed outside the temple along with other deities like Folk deities, Ravalnath and Mother Goddess. Here the top panel depicts the Goddess Laxmi who is portrayed in seated on pedestal in a *padmasana* posture flanked by a pair of elephants (Figure 12). Two hands are shown holding lotus buds. She is well ornamented and represented wearing a *kirtimukuta* and adorned with ornaments. Absence of attendants on either side. On either side of Gajalakshmi are two elephants with riders, the elephants are pouring water over her (*abhishekajal*). Lower panel portrays a scene of a procession of men and women with musical instruments. People are playing

instruments in the honor of the Goddess. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Fourteen -Fifteenth century AD approximately.



Figure 12: Gajalakshmi Panel, Ponsuli, Sattari taluka



Figure 13: Gajalakshmi Panel, Pali, Sattari taluka



Figure 14: Gajalakshmi Panel, Anaconem, Pernem taluka



Figure 15: Gajalakshmi Panel, Virnoda, Pernem taluka



Figure 16: Gajalakshmi Panel, Kundaim, Ponda taluka



Figure 17: Gajalakshmi Panel, Kodar, Ponda taluka



Figure 18: Gajalakshmi Panel, Usgaon, Dharbandoda taluka

Gajalakshmi Panels from Pernem Taluka: In Pernem taluka two panels are reported from Anaconem and Virnoda villages. These panels are small in size as compared to panels found in Sattari taluka. The panel reported at Anaconem village is placed outside the Mahadev temple along with other deities such as Betal, Mother goddess, Ravalnath and other folk deities. All these deities are not in worshipped today. Here the panel is divided into two parts, the lower part of the panel shows men and women dancing and playing instruments (Figure 13). The upper part is shown with the Goddess in seated posture with two well ornamented elephants in standing posture and pouring water over her. The deity is well ornamented wearing with *haar*, *kundalas*, *keyuras*, *nupuras* and *kankanas*. The panel reported at Virnoda village is worshipped in the garbhagriha as the main deity in *Bhavkadevi* temple. Here the deity is called as *Bhavkadevi* locally though iconographically she is Gajalakshmi. As the panel seen at Anaconem village, this panel is divided into two parts (Figure 14). The lower part shows men and women dancing and playing instruments whereas the upper part is shown with seated Goddess flanked by celestial deities with two elephants pouring water on her (*abhishekajal*). Based on stylistic and iconographical features both of the above panels are dated back to c. Fourteen -Fifteenth century AD approximately.

Gajalakshmi Panel from Bicholim Taluka: In Bicholim taluka one panel from Usap village was reported. Here the panel is worshipped inside the temple along with other deities such as Mahishasurmardini. This panel is divided into two parts. The panel is

weathered and few features and figures are not identifiable clearly. The lower panel is shown with dancers and musicians and horse riders too. The attendants are seen on the either side of the deity. Based on stylistic and iconographical features both of the above panels are dated back to c. Thirteenth -Fifteenth century AD approximately.

Table 1: List of Recently Reported Gajalakshmi Panels

Sl. No.	Find spot/Location	Period	Measurements
1	Advoi, Sattari taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	48x 112cms
2	Saleli, Sattari taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	51x 133cms
3	Saleli, Sattari taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	51x 69cms
4	Thane, Sattari taluka	c. 10-12 century AD	60x 142cms
5	Thane, Sattari taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	48x 87cms
6	Velus, Sattari taluka	c. 12-14 century AD	45x 69cms
7	Velus, Sattari taluka	c. 12-14 century AD	59x 92cms
8	Velus, Sattari taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	49x 55cms
9	Kumtal, Sattari taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	77x 89cms
10	Kumtal, Sattari taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	42x 85cms
11	Ponsuli, Sattari taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	68x 72cms
12	Pali, Sattari taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	64x 77cms
13	Anaconem, Pernem taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	39x 59cms
14	Virnoda, Pernem taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	45x 69cms
15	Usap, Bicholim taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	39x 86cms
16	Kundaim, Ponda taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	49x 96cms
17	Kodar, Ponda taluka	c. 13-15 century AD	47x 98cms
18	Usgaon, Dharbandoda taluka	c. 14-15 century AD	73x 91cms

Gajalakshmi Panels from Ponda Taluka: At Kundaim village in Ponda taluka one panel was reported. The panel at Kundaim is similar to one panel reported from Thane village in Sattari taluka (Figure 16). Currently this panel is not in worship and is been placed outside Betal temple. The figure of Goddess shown on the panel is weathered. The Goddess is in seated posture with two elephants on either side pouring water on her (*abhishekajal*). The elephants shown here are larger in size than the deity. The *ghanta* in the neck of the elephants are absent. The upper portion is shown with men and women figures dancing and playing the instruments. The portion below the deity is unoccupied and simple. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Fourteen -Fifteenth century AD approximately. Second Gajalakshmi panel is reported from Kodar village in Ponda taluka. Here Goddess is seen seated atop a pedestal, holding lotus buds in her hand (Figure 17). She is flanked by attendants fanning her, two ornate elephants and two warriors in full military gear who are bowing in front of her. The middle panel depicts cavalrymen whereas the panel at the bottom shows people dancing and singing hymns in the praise of the Goddess. Currently this panel is placed at Community hall at Kodar village and is under worship by the local people. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Thirteenth -Fifteenth century AD approximately.

Gajalakshmi Panel from Dharbandoda Taluka: The panel reported from Usgaon village in Dharbandoda taluka is worshiped in Betal temple. The panel is divided into two parts. The lower is shown with the figures of men and women dancing and playing instruments. The horse riders, warriors and cavalrymen are also depicted on the lower part of the panel. The Goddess is in seated posture shown on the upper part of the panel flanked by two elephants pouring water (*abhishekajal*). The Goddess is fully ornamented with *haar*, *kundalas*, *keyuras*, *nupuras* and *kankanas*. Based on stylistic and iconographical features this panel is dated back to c. Fourteen -Fifteenth century AD approximately.

Different Names and Worship of Gajalakshmi

During the course of field work, several types of Gajalakshmi panels in Goa are documented. Female deities in Goa have folk origins and regional variations. Some of which have been observed and discussed in the present research paper. It has noticed that various legends and traditions are also associated with them. Though Gajalakshmi panels are found in all the talukas in Goa. However, the cult of Gajalakshmi worship is strongest in areas of Sattari taluka. This is evident from a large number of panels recovered in this area.

Table 2: Different names of Gajalakshmi

Sr. No.	Name Given	Site
1	Bhaukadevi	Shiroda, Ponda taluka
2	Bhaukadevi	Virnoda, Pernem taluka
3	Gajantlakshmi	Kothambi, Bicholim taluka
4	<i>Kelbai</i>	Kudnem, Bicholim taluka
5	<i>Kelbai</i>	Keri, Ponda
6	<i>Kelbai</i>	Dhabe, Sattari taluka
7	<i>Kelbai</i>	Pissurlem, Sattari taluka
8	Mahamaya	Kumtal, Sattari taluka
9	Mahamaya	Kopordem, Sattari taluka
10	<i>Kelbai</i>	Mauxi, Sattari taluka
11	<i>Kelbai</i>	Ponsuli, Sattari taluka
12	<i>Kelbai</i>	Saleli, Sattari taluka
13	<i>Kelbai</i>	Sonal, Sattari taluka
14	<i>Kelbai</i>	Zarme, Sattari taluka
15	<i>Kelbai</i>	Saleli, Sattari taluka
16	<i>Kelbai</i>	Bhiupal, Sattari taluka

Though Gajalakshmi panels are found and worshipped in Goa, none of them are addressed as Gajalakshmi. She is known by different names such as *Kelbai*, *Bhauka* or *Gajantlaksmi*, etc. (Table 2). When referred to different name, iconographically she is the same but concept isn't alike. For instance, *Bhavakadevi* is worshipped by pregnant woman, offerings such as bangles if a woman wishes to have a girl child and offerings

such as cloth piece with coconuts if a women wishes to have a baby boy. Sometimes, Gajalakshmi is found accommodated with other affiliated deities in a common hall of the temple shrine.

Gajalakshmi as *Sateri*, *Bhauka* is worshipped as *Gramadevata*. The priests in the temples of *Bhauka* and *Sateri* belong to *Gavda* community of Goa. Besides Gajalakshmi, Betal is also worshipped by priest of *Gavda* community. During the village to village survey, the researcher came across several images of Betal worshipped along with Gajalakshmi (e.g. In Kodar and Kundaim villages, Ponda taluka, Anaconem in Pernem taluka, Pali in Sattari taluka, etc.) which indicates that there was a close association among them. According to the proverb in Goa, it is said “*Bhavakadevik na ghov ani betalak na bayal*” which means *Bhavakadevi* does not have a husband and Betal does not have a wife.

Panels of Gajalakshmi of the early period are simple. The ornamentation on the panels of Gajalakshmi was more in the later period. Some of the exquisite examples of previously documented panels are found in Chandor village, Sanguem taluka and Shiroda village, Ponda taluka with of depiction of lion motifs on it. Further Gajalakshmi panel at Zarme, Sattari taluka is the only specimen where *samudramanthan* is depicted. Gajalakshmi panels are also shown with *kiritimukuta* at the upper portion of the seated deity. Apart from this, the stone panels were filled with royal possession scenes, sailors on the boat, *mithuna* couples and even erotic figures as decorative motifs. Gajalakshmi panels at Zarme, Mauxi, Thane, Keri, Usgaon villages are the fine examples of ornamentations.

On the panels of Gajalakshmi as well as on Mahishasurmardini, the representation of animals is seen apart from other figures and motifs. Depiction of lion is seen on both Gajalakshmi as well as on Mahishasurmardini images. Here a depiction of a lion figure is the affiliation to the deity who is also represents the form of Durga. Scholars have identified the figure of lion as Kadamba emblem and hence dated these panels to the Kadamba period. The only resembling depiction of the Kadamba emblem lion can be seen at Mahadev temple, Tambdi Surla in Dharbandoda taluka which is shown with a raised paw.

Apart from these features, there are other decorative features seen on the recently reported panels. Features such as *Chauri bearers*, horses, *Kiritimukha*, etc. *Kiritimukha* is noticed on the top of the panel of only one village of Pali in Sattari taluka. Musicians, dancers and people playing instruments are seen on the panels of Anaconem and Virnoda (Pernem taluka), Advoi, Saleli, Thane (Sattari taluka) and so on. Besides elephants, horses are also seen on the panels of Kodar in Ponda taluka. Figures of *chauri bearer* are seen at the base of the panels of Virnoda, Pernem taluka and Kothambi, Bicholim taluka. Elephant rider is seen shown on panel of Ponsuli in Sattari taluka. Some of the earlier documented Gajalakshmi panels reveal rare features. One of such examples is of ornamented elephant can be seen on panel of *Holiyeche mal* at Mauxi in Sattari taluka. Further, the motif on Gajalakshmi panel at Sattarey village in

Sattari taluka resembles fire altar. War scenes are also seen on the panel of Bondla in Dharbandoda taluka.

One can certainly say that north district of Goa i.e. Sattari taluka and parts of Bicholim taluka is Sateri worship centric. The concept of *Sattarkar* (Sateri), *Kelmekar* (Kelbai) and *Bhiramnekar* (Brahmanimaya) is prevalent in the villages of Sattari taluka. Village community called *Sattarkar*, *Kelmekar* and *Bhiramnekar* are followers of deities Sateri, *Kelbai* and Brahmanimaya respectively. *Zaadani* and Bondirwada villages in Sattari taluka still follow this concept where all three deities are worshipped together.

Conclusion

Development of all the Gajalakshmi panels found in Goa can be seen from time to time. These panels became part of the temples and for worship as cult objects. Besides temples, these panels are noticed today worshipped in temple as main deity, placed in the premises of temples, small shrines and also worshipped in sacred grooves. In the absence of inscriptional records, it becomes difficult to date the images. The dating of images in the study area has been done relatively, i.e. by comparative study. Based on field visits in villages and exploration work list of panels found in the State of Goa have been prepared in table form giving details of find spot and current location as well as period and its measurements for systematic study.

The research analysis incorporated shows that most of the panels of Gajalakshmi are found from the Sattari taluka. This proves the cult of Gajalakshmi worship was strongest in areas of Sattari taluka. And till date it continues to be the strongest. These images are still in worship in temples, small shrines and in the sacred grooves of the villages. However, there is limited literary evidence on these sculptural remains. Limited textual sources acted as a barrier in understanding and documenting these panels. Another limitation was due to heavy rainfall and salinity these panels are weathered and at times it became difficult to understand the stylistic features. Most of the panels reported are found in the villages are kept outside the temples or in villages suffering the vagaries of nature.

From archaeological studies it is argued that most of the trends in art and architecture in the past were set by the people, artists, and craftsmen of a particular time period. Very rarely it can be affiliated to any particular king or dynasty. Hence for the present research, researcher attributes the chronology of the above studied Gajalakshmi panels to time periods rather than connecting with dynastic rule. Based on stylistic features the sculptural remains time period is set-up between the c. 10th -12th century AD and c. 13th- 15th century AD. The reported Gajalakshmi panels indicate that Goa had played an important role in various aspects of history such as cultural, religious, social and political.

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