



The
Magic of
Ganapati

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Introduction

The popular lore of Hinduism often rests on the esoteric lore of the t̄antrik tradition and takes on a different form as it passes through the centuries. Yet if the images, the yantras and the original t̄antrik texts, such as they are, remain, it is not too hard to tease from these the truths which lie beyond the popular.

In present-day Hinduism Gaṇeśa has degenerated into a god stopping obstacles, and his image can often be seen in shops. The shopkeepers worship him for the success of their trade.

If we look at a contemporary image of Gaṇeśa, the iconography has preserved much of the esoteric side, although the exoteric side has triumphed. We see a strange composite of elephant and man, and at the bottom of the picture a mouse or rat.

The image represents the three worlds — of heaven, earth and the underworld, or sun, moon and fire. And in a very clever and wise way the symbolism has been drawn from the animal or mammal kingdom. In this picture mankind is the mean between the large universe and the small universe.

Because of this triple symbolism Gaṇeśa is connected with the three guṇas. His association with obstacles comes from the great strength of the elephant, the intelligence of the human and the subtlety or ability to penetrate small spaces like a mouse or rat.

Gaṇeśa is usually shown with four arms — these represent the four directions of space or the four elements — the god being the spirit or quintessence of these.

The word Gaṇeśa means lord of hosts. As usual in the t̄antrik symbolism the name is really an adjective and this adjective is also applied to Śiva. The hosts are the hosts of spirits or denizens of the three worlds.

Although Gaṇeśa is usually thought of as the son of Śiva and Parvati, the

more cosmic view is that he is, simply, a specialised aspect or symbol of the primordial god. Because we follow nature, it is entirely natural that primordial godhead is represented by the penis, while the goddess is shown by the yoni. The ancients found it natural to conceive of the sexual union of a woman and man as analogous to the creation of the cosmos.

There formerly existed an esoteric group of Gaṇeśa worshippers who worshipped the Gaṇeśa līṅga and his Śakti's yoni as creators of our cosmos. This cult was one of the five primary tāntrik traditions but appears to have disappeared around the 14th century.

Contemporary images of the elephant-headed god invariably show him clothed. But Formerly this was not the case. We can note the following prescriptions for images drawn from a medieval tāntrik work:—

Gaṇeśa is of vermilion colour, naked, and has three eyes with a large belly. In his four hands he holds a tusk, a noose, a goad and grants boons. He holds in his trunk a pomegranate and a crescent moon is on his forehead. He is adorned with huge serpents. His forehead is gleaming with the ichor of rut while on his left thigh sits his Śakti. She embraces him with one arm while with her other she holds his penis.

The symbolism relating Gaṇeśa as being a child of Śiva and Pārvatī also has meaning. Their other son is Skanda or Kārtikeya. He rides a peacock. If we take Śiva as guru, his sons, one with him in spiritual lineage, are the divine and the heroic dispositions of the tāntrik traditions. Gaṇeśa and Skanda are princes and Śiva is the king.

Gaṇapati Upanisad

Auspiciousness to those who hear — thus the Śānti.

1. Oṃ Gaṇ¹ I bow to Gaṇapati.
2. You clearly are the tattva². You alone are the creator. You alone are the maintainer. You alone are the destroyer³. Of all this you certainly are Brahmān⁴. You plainly are the essence.
3. Always I speak amṛta⁵. The truth I speak.
4. Protect me. Protect the speakers. Protect the hearers. Protect the givers. Protect the holders. Protect the disciple that repeats. Protect that in the east. Protect that in the south. Protect that in the west. Protect that in the north. Protect that above. Protect that below. Everywhere protect! Protect me everywhere!⁶
5. You are speech. You are consciousness. You are bliss. You are Brahmā. You are being-consciousness-bliss. You are the non-dual. You are plainly Brahmā. You are knowledge. You are intelligence.
6. You create all this world. You maintain all this world. All this world is seen in you. You are earth, water, air, fire, aether⁷. You are beyond the four measures of speech. You are beyond the three guṇas. You are beyond the three bodies. You are beyond the three times. You are always situated in the mūlādhāra⁸. You are the being of the three Śaktis⁹. You

- 1 The root or bija mantra of the deva.
- 2 In this case the word tattva means all and everything.
- 3 These are the three guṇas in their triple form.
- 4 The absolute.
- 5 Literally, the imperishable.
- 6 Covering every direction.
- 7 The five elements too.
- 8 The base cakra in the human body.

are always meditated on by yogins. You are Brahmā, you are Viṣṇu, you are Rudra, you are Agni, you are Vayu, you are the sun, you are the moon, you are Brahmā, bhur-bhuvah-svar¹⁰.

7 Ga is the first syllable, after that the first letter, beyond that ṃ, then the half-moon all together. Joined with ṃ, this is the mantra form.

8 The letter ga is the first form, letter a the middle form, ṃ the last form. bindu the higher form, nada the joining together, saṃhita the junction. This is the vidyā of Lord Gaṇeśa.

9 Gaṇaka is the seer, nricad-gayatri the metre, Śrī Mahāgaṇapati the devatā. Oṃ gaṇapataye namah.¹¹

10 Let us think of the one-toothed, let us meditate on the crooked trunk, may that tusk direct us.¹²

11. One tusk, four arms, carrying noose and goad, with his hands dispelling fear and granting boons, with a mouse as his banner.

12. Red, with a big belly, with ears like winnowing baskets, wearing red, with limbs smeared with red scent, truly worshipped with red flowers.

13. To the devoted a merciful deva, the maker of the world, the prime cause, who at the beginning of creation was greater than nature and man.

14. He who always meditates thus is a yogin above yogins.

15. Hail to the lord of vows, hail to Gaṇapati, hail to the first lord, hail unto you, to the big-bellied, one-tusked, obstacle-destroyer, the son of Śiva, to the boon-giver, hail, hail!

16. He who studies this atharva text¹³ moves towards Brahmā. He is

9 Of action, will and knowledge.

10 The three worlds.

11 The extended mantra of the deva.

12 This is the deva's own gayatri mantra to be recited at the four twilights.

always blissful. He is not bound by any obstacles. He is liberated from the five greater and the five lesser sins. Evening meditation destroys the unmeritorious actions of the night. At both evening and morning he is liberated from the bad and he attains dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa¹⁴.

17. This atharva text should not be given to those not pupils. If from delusion a person so gives, he is a bad person.

18. He who wants something may accomplish it by 1,000 recitations of this. He who sprinkles Gaṇapati with this becomes eloquent. He who recites this on a fourth day becomes a knower of vidyā. This is an artharva saying: “He who moves towards Brahmāvidyā is never afraid.” He who worships with fried grains becomes famous and becomes intelligent. He who worships with sweet-meat (modaka) gains the desired fruit. He who worships with samit and ghee by him all is attained, all is gained by him. He who makes eight brahmānas understand this becomes like the sun’s rays. In a solar eclipse, in a great river, or in front of an image having recited (this) he gets accomplished in the mantra. He becomes liberated from great obstacles. He is freed from great misfortunes.



13 The atharva is the fourth and heterodox veda.

14 The four aims of mankind: right thinking, acquisition of wealth, sexuality and liberation.