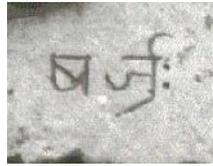


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THE INSCRIBED LABEL “SHARJUH” ON KHAJURAHO SCULPTURES – IS IT A SCULPTOR’S NAME?



Khajuraho has hundreds of small engravings with names of sculptors, *āchāryas* and *ganas* on sculptural panels in temples, in addition to the three large stone slabs bearing long foundational inscriptions of temples and other shorter donative inscriptions and pilgrims’ records,¹. There are several inscribed names of artists on sculptural panels *in situ* in temples. Most of these are in temples built in the 10th and early 11th century, such as the Lakshmana (Vaikuntha), Varāha, Viśvanātha, and to a lesser extent in the Devī Jagadambā, Chitragupta (Sūrya), and the Kandariya Mahādeva. There are names such as Vachchharāja, Pahasaga, Deda, Jajega, Śrī Jasa, Chhichchha and hundreds of others in these small inscriptions on sculptural panels in temples. These minor engravings have been read and analyzed by Arvind K. Singh, in his article “Minor Inscriptions of Khajuraho”.² He has given detailed documentation of these inscribed names and their categories, and listed their occurrence on different locations of the temple.

However, there is one name “*Sharjuh*” (and its variants *Shajuh*, *Shaja*, *Shajah*), which is prominently seen engraved on museum images, but not on sculptures *in situ*³. Krishna Deva has listed 18 such sculptures with this name, “engraved in an identical Nāgarī script, assignable to circa 11th century AD.” He says: “All the inscriptions are engraved by the same hand. Similarly, all the images are alike in style and appear to have been fashioned by the same artist. The inscriptions appear to furnish the name of the sculptor himself and the different spellings only indicate that the sculptor who had

engraved them was hardly literate, and spelt the name differently on different occasions as is usually done by the semi- or neo-literate.”⁴ Stella Kramrisch, commenting on the word “*Shajuh*” inscribed on the base of a Khajuraho sculpture, (earlier called Kubera, but identified later by R. C. Agrawala as Bhairava⁵), now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, also takes it to be a name of the craftsman.⁶ But we will soon find out whether “*Sharjuh*” and its variants refer to names of sculptors.

In addition, I have been able to find some more sculptures with this name engraved on their pedestals. There are 28 sculptures that bear the name “*Sharjuh*” or its variants, seen in the Archaeological Museum Khajuraho; Indian Museum, Kolkata; Allahabad Museum; British Museum, London, and Philadelphia Museum, USA.

Sculptures with “*Sharjuh*” or its variants inscribed:

- Ambikā, two-armed, No. 1212, Sharjuh (Fig. 1);
- Ambikā, four-armed, seated, No. 1592, Shajuh;
- Manovegā, No. 940, Shajuh (Fig. 2);
- Indra standing, No. 924 Sharjuh;
- Four-armed Śiva, seated, No. 519, Shaja;
- Two images of Vāmana, Nos. 432, 438, Shajah;
- Narasimha, No. 1253, Shajuh;
- Vishnu standing, No. 126, Shaja;
- Vishnu’s forms, standing, No. 1561, Shajuh;
- Navagrahas frieze, No. 480, Shaja;
- Kārttikeya, No. 1099, Shajuh;
- Varuna, Shajuh;
- Parikara* with Bhairava and Nandi, No. 1470, Shajuh;
- A divine couple, No. 348, (open air museum);
- Brahmā and consort, No. 318;
- Five images of Umā-Maheśvara in Khajuraho Museum, Nos. 351, 494; 461 (in Dulādeva style, Fig. 3); 504 (standing image); No. 524;⁷ and Umā-Maheśvara in Allahabad Museum, AIIS 13.79, No. AM 263, Shaja;
- Also AIIS 13.97, No. AM 291, Shaja;⁸
- Umā-Maheśvara in Indian Museum, Kolkata, No. 65/22, (original Khajuraho Museum No.498), Shaja;
- Vishnu on Garuda, Allahabad Museum, No. AM 265, Shajuh;

Vishnu-Lakshmī, British Museum, 1957- 2-16, of Dulādeva style, similar to No. 461, Shajuh;

Bhairava (earlier called Kubera), Philadelphia Museum of Art, No. 56.75.26, marked Shajuh.

However, when examining these sculptures, I noticed that they are not of just one period, i.e. 11th century, but range from the middle of the 10th century (seated two-armed Ambikā, No.1212 of Fig. 1, Vishnu standing, No. 126) to the middle of 12th century, Dulādeva style (Vishnu-Lakshmī, British Museum, and Umā-Maheśvara, Khajuraho Museum, No. 461, Fig. 3). The Jaina *śāsanā*-Devī Manovegā, No. 940, (Fig. 2) can be assigned to 11th century, as also several Śaiva figures.



Fig. 1. Ambikā, c. mid 10th century, Khajuraho Museum, No. 1212, inscribed *Sharjuh*. Copyright ASI

Certainly, the sculptures bearing the name “*Sharjuh*” and its variants on their pedestals were work of different periods and hence by different craftsmen, though the engraved name is by one hand.

S.K. Dikshit’s suggestion that “these inscribed images refer to the *Khajur sāgar* and were meant to adorn its bank” has been added by Krishna Deva in a footnote.⁹ This suggestion can be of help in understanding the issue. *Sharjuh* could stand for *Kharjuh*, the local lake “*Khajursāgar*” as suggested by S.K. Dikshit.



detail

Fig. 2. Manovegā, c. 11th century, Khajuraho Museum, No. 940, inscribed *Shajuh*. Copyright ASI

Kha could have been written as Sha. Scribes often write “Sha” for Ka and Kha in Nāgarī script as. V. M. Kulkarni, Ajay Mitra Sastri and. Pratapaditya Pal verified, and on which L.H. Bhojak has done research.¹⁰ So Sharju can stand for Kharju.



Fig. 3. Umā-Maheśvara, c. mid 12th century, Khajuraho Museum No. 461, inscribed *Shajuh*. Copyright ASI

Notably there are some other sculptures with the name “Sevam Sāgara” or “Seva Sāgara” inscribed on their pedestals.

Sculptures with “Seva Sāgara” inscribed:

Vishnu images, Nos. 35, 39, 117, 124;

Śiva-Pārvatī standing, No. 492 (Fig. 4).

S. K. Dikshit, as referred to by Krishna Deva, has suggested that this engraved name “Seva Sāgara” applies to the Śivasāgar tank (near the Western group of temples), just as “Sharjuh” refers to Khajursāgar tank near the Khajuraho village. According to Dikshit, these inscribed sculptures adorned the banks of these lakes.

It is also true, what Krishna Deva has said, as quoted earlier, that all the inscriptions are engraved by the same hand and that that these were in an identical Nāgarī script. But I would like to point out again that the sculptures range from mid 10th century to mid 12th century, a period of 200 years. How then can we explain engravings to be work of one hand? To this mystery we will soon return.

While going through the sculptures of the Khajuraho Museum, my attention was drawn by the engraved name “*Ghantāhi*” on seven sculptures. It is also inscribed on a doorjamb from Khajuraho, now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The name is engraved generally on the left side of the pedestal or base of the sculptures. Two of the elegant Jaina Ādinātha images of early 10th century, displayed in the main Khajuraho Museum, have this name engraved on left corners; the other sculptures are in the open-air Museum.

Sculptures with “*Ghantāhi*” inscribed:

Jina Ādinātha, displayed in the main Museum, No. 1667, on left side pedestal;

Jina Ādinātha, displayed in the main Museum, No. 1682, on the left side pedestal;

Jina Pārśvanātha, open-air Museum, No. 1641, on the pedestal, left side;

Jina Pārśvanātha, on the pedestal, below Padmāvatī Yakshī, No. 1619;

A fragment of a doorjamb depicting *ganas*, No. 1058;

Elephants and man, No. 989;

Vyāla and man, No. 165

Door jamb with Gangā, now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, No. 65/25.

Significantly, the name “*Ghantāhi*” is a 19th century local name of a Jaina temple in the eastern zone, near the Khajuraho village. This temple, now without walls but consisting of a marvelous doorjamb and exquisitely carved pillars, has the bell or “*ghanta*” motifs on pillars. The temple was dedicated to Jina Ādinātha, as the Yakshī Chakreśvarī presides over the door lintel. But the temple is locally known as *Ghantāi* or *Ghantāhi* since the 19th century because of the bell motifs on its pillars. As the two

images of Ādinātha bear the label “Ghantāhi”, we know for sure that they were brought to the Museum from this temple. So some classifier who collected the images from this temple site and brought them at one place for preservation must have engraved this name “Ghantāhi” on such images. The engraving of the site name on pedestals of images is then a 19th or early 20th century work.



Fig. 4. Śiva-Pārvatī, Khajuraho Museum, No. 492, inscribed *Seva Sāgara*

This marking of detached sculptures with site names must have been done not before 1870s. For, while going through old photographs of Khajuraho, preserved in the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library, London, I saw a photograph of a 10th century sculptured slab depicting Śiva-Pārvatī, standing on the bank of the Śivasāgar lake. This sculptural slab (Fig. 4), now in the open-air Museum,

No. 492, did not earlier have any marking of “Seva Sāgara” in the photograph, which is seen now on its right side corner. This proves beyond doubt that the name “Seva Sāgara” was engraved after 1870.

Another proof of the late markings of such names is the engraving of “*Nanorātal*” on the left hand side of the famous four-footed (Chatushpāda) Sadāśiva image in the Khajuraho Museum, No. 1098. Major General Cunningham, who first reported this image (though wrongly identified it as Shanmukha-Kārttikeya, because of six heads) from the western bank of the Khajursāgar tank, does not note this engraved name “Nanorātal”, the local name of the Khajursāgar tank. He gives full details of the two-line inscription on its pedestal with the name of Āchārya Ūrdhva-Śiva.¹¹ So until 1883-84, the time of ASI Report, the name Nanorātal was not inscribed on the Sadāśiva image.

Repair work at Khajuraho has been going on since 1843, the time of Chhatarpur Maharaja Pratap Singh. The late Maharaja, who died in 1854, had left instructions in his Will to spend at least 5 Rupees per day on reparation work, as Vincent Smith tells us in his paper published in 1879.¹² Conservation work at Khajuraho has been noted in the *Progress Report of the Western Circle, 1903-1904*. It reads: “A recommendation was made for the better and safer arrangement of the hundreds of more or less mutilated sculptures already gathered together near the north-western group.” The Report of 1906-1907 states that it was decided to get the open-air museum started at once. Finally, the Khajuraho site Museum, then known as the Jardine Museum, started as an open-air shed near the Western group of temples in 1910, by E. W. Jardine, the Political Agent, Bundelkhand.

It seems that before the Khajuraho Museum began to function, the detached sculptures were assembled, brought to one place and were marked with site labels. Those found near Khajursāgar tank were engraved “Sharjuh” or its variants, those from the banks of Sivasāgar tank were marked “Seva Sāgara” in Nāgarī script. It is strange that the names were engraved instead of being painted. Generally, white or black paint would be used instead of engraving in stone for marking sculptures. But similar engraving to mark the site name is also exemplified in Buddhist sculptures of Kurkihar in Bihar, where “K” is inscribed in the 19th century on two sculptures, now in the British Museum, as pointed out to me by Dr. Michael D. Willis.¹³

Thus, the inscribed names “Ghantāhi” and “Nanorātal”, which are the local names prevalent in the 19th century, help us to solve the mystery of the other engraved

site names “Sharjuh” and “Seva Sāgara”. What is important to note is that these names are not seen on any of the sculptures *in situ* in Khajuraho temples, but are noticeable only on detached sculptures that are now in museums.

So we can say with certainty that “Sharjuh” and its variants inscribed below sculptures do not refer to the name of a sculptor, but are site labels inscribed on these images to note the source from where these were collected and brought to the Jardine Museum of Khajuraho.

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- Fig. 4. Śiva-Pārvatī, Khajuraho Museum, No. 492, inscribed *Seva Sāgara*

Notes and References

¹ *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. I, 1892. Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, 1990, chapter 4 on Inscriptions at Khajuraho, pp. 334 ff

² Arvind K. Singh, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai*, Vol. 64-66, for 1989-91, pp. 222-237; who presented his findings in a paper at the Khajuraho Seminar in 1987, “Builders of Khajuraho”, in *Khajuraho in Perspective*, Bhopal, 1994.

³ Devangana Desai, “Inscribed Site Labels on Khajuraho Sculptures”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Vol. 76, 2002

⁴ Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*, ASI, 1990, p. 394.

⁵ In personal communication

⁶ Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia, 1960, Plate 32, p. 94

⁷ K. Suresh, “Umā-Maheśvara Sculptures from Khajuraho”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Vols. 64-66 for 1989-91, pp. 242-248

⁸ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, not dated, Plates CXXXVIII, CXLII

⁹ Krishna Deva, *op. cit.* p. 10

¹⁰ Lakshmanbhai Hiralal Bhojak, “Madhyakālin Nāgarī Lipino Parichaya”, written for Sharadaben Educational Research Institute, Ahmedabad.

¹¹ Cunningham, *ASIR*, 1883-84, p. 63

¹² Vincent Smith and F. C. Black in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1879, Vol. 48, pp. 285ff

¹³ Michael D. Willis, Curator in the Department of Oriental Antiquities in the British Museum, showed me two Buddhist images from Kurkihar with inscription “K”.