

## ***VETAL SCULPTURES OF GOA***

Goa being the centre of the *Vetal* cult, there are a number of *Vetal* sculptures. Many of these have similar characteristics. Therefore, some of the early sculptures of *Vetal* which are important from the point of view of iconography and art and which have special characteristics are dealt with here. Two stone sculptures of *Vetal* from Salcete taluka (Betalbatim and Sarzora) have been displayed in the Archaeological Survey of Indian Museum at Old Goa (plate No. 15-16). The heads and hands of *Vetal* from Betalbatim have been broken. The ribs have been shown projecting and the image has unemaciated belly. He wears a necklace of *Naga* (cobra) and the head of *Naga* is shown as a pendant. The long necklace of skulls (*rundamala*) reaches below the knees, the scorpion is shown horizontally on the abdomen. The waist band (*katibandha*) is shown excessively broad and looks like a belt. On each side below this waist-band a bell is suspended to the chain. The long membrane virile is shown in the normal fashion (*adhoretas*). The legs of the *Vetal* are cylindrical, thigh bones and knee-caps are not visible.

The legs and the hands upto the elbow of the *Vetal* sculpture from Sarzona have been completely broken. The head-gear is knit by serpents and has been divided into tiers. The upper tier has a series of hoods and in the lower tier at the centre a large hood has been chiselled. The *Vetal* has a broad face with wide open eyes and his eye-balls are bulging out. His mouth is partly open and the fangs are clearly seen. The ears are long and he is shown with a necklace (*rundamala*). Earlobes look as if they are torn on account of the heavy weight of the earrings. He is shown with armlets (*keyura* and *angada*) made up of *nagas*. The head gear and the armlets which are of *nagas* are as prescribed in *Vts*. This association of *Naga* with *Vetal* may be due to the fact that he has been described as *patalvasi* (the resident of the world below the earth) and that is the abode of *nagas* also<sup>142</sup>. Scorpion below the centre of the ribs on the abdomen, is shown as perpendicular and is not depicted horizontally as in the case of the Betalbatim sculpture. Although both the sculptures of *Vetal* from Salcete are shown with projecting ribs, the ribs of the Betalbatim image looks more realistic and natural where as the ribs of the *Vetal*

from Sarzora will appear to be conventionalised.

In the *Vetal* sculpture from Navelim, the head and the right fore arm and the chest have been broken. Therefore, only the left arm, the rear part of the right arm and the legs are intact. In the list of the temples destroyed by the Portuguese, the temple of *Vetal* from Navelim has been mentioned. In November 1998, while digging for the foundation, this sculpture of *Vetal* was discovered. The Sculpture has carved strong arms but the bones are visible. Legs are not bony but these are shown in octagonal fashion and look like pillars. This is the only *Vetal* sculpture from Goa, which has polygonal legs. He is shown with matted hair (*jata*) which has reached below the waist in a serpentine fashion<sup>143</sup>. This matted hair has not been noticed on the other sculptures of *Vetal* from Goa. The waist band (*katibandha*) has a series of bells hanging along the waist. The necklace of heads (*rundamala*) is also found around his neck. On the left hand side, a dagger is seen. One does not know whether *Vetal* is holding it or not. *Vetal* has armlets (*angada*) of serpents (*naga*) and bracelets (*kankanas*). However, those *kankanas* are not of *naga* but resemble silver ornaments worn by children and women of Karnataka and Maharashtra about three decades ago.

*Vetal* sculpture from Loliem is the tallest image of *Vetal* found so far. The roofless shrine is located in Loliem village of Canacona taluka. *Vetal* is standing on a high platform in the midst of four pillars. The height of this stone sculpture is more than 2 mts. This is the only *Vetal* sculpture shown in *tribhanga* posture and all other sculptures of *Vetal* from Goa are in *Sambhanga*. This *Vetal* also has the nimbus (*prabhavali*) which is not found in other sculptures of *Vetal* from Goa. Moreover Loliem *Vetal* also has space to insert a sword in the right hand and in the left hand he is holding the head of a goat. Perhaps it is the goat which has been sacrificed to please him. His hand is resting on the post. He is wearing earrings (*kundalas*) armlets (*angadas*) and bracelets (*kankanas*). He is wearing a necklace of skulls (*rundmala*). In his left thumb he has a ring. A ball which has been tied to the chain can be seen on the right leg below the knees. He has a long penis. The aforesaid description clearly illustrates that the *Vetal* sculpture of Loliem is unique in Goa.

## ***THE CULT OF VETAL***

It would be appropriate at this stage, to deal with the cult of *Vetal*. Independent shrines of *Vetal* with *Vetal* images have not been reported from many parts of India. Only in Goa and in South Sindhudurg district there are simple structures enshrining the *Vetal* images and these are being worshipped. *Vetal* and *Vaitali* from Badami and Doddagaddavalli *Vetal* are not independent shrines and these *Vetals* are not in worship. Bhubaneshwar has *Vaital* (*Vetal*) temple but the presiding deity is *Chamunda*. The iconological factors such as the rise of *Kapalikas*, *Pasupatas* and *Nath Panthis* thus shaping the image of *Vetal* have been already dealt with. However, the popularity of *Vetal* in Goa is perplexing. This may be explained on the basis of the tradition found in *Vts*. *Vetal* is the destroyer of storms and is the promoter of trade and commerce<sup>144</sup>. During the Silahara Kadamba period, maritime activity increased considerably. This is indicated by the representation of a naval battle found on the hero stones of the Silaharas and the Kadambas<sup>145</sup>. During the Kadamba period, Goa had international trade with many of the countries. Therefore, merchants may also have patronized the worship of *Vetal*. The factors mentioned above may have been responsible for the spread of *Vetal* worship in Goa.

Though *Vetal* became a part of the *Brahminical* temple (as *parivar devta* or *Panchyatana*), his popularity as a village deity did not decrease. In fact he retained the same position<sup>146</sup>. These later images of *Vetal* have a beard, a moustache and a crown (*mukuta*). Although the number of hands has not changed in the image is now depicted as having a sword in one hand and a bowl (*patra*) in the other hand and a shield in another. In the earlier *Vetal* images, the sword was an inseparable part of the sculpture as it was carved in stone. But in the sculptures of *Vetal* of the later period, the provision was made to insert the sword of steel in the fist of *Vetal*. However, the bowl (*patra*) continued to be of stone. The scorpion shown on the abdomen of the early images of *Vetal* is not found on the later images. In some villages *Vetal* was provided with a mask of brass.

*Vetal* is considered as the chief ghost and an evil spirit. In Dakshina Kannada the worship of ghosts is called *Bhutaradhana*<sup>147</sup>. There

were no *mantrikas* performing witchcraft associated with *Vetal* in Goa.

The tradition for non-*Brahmin* priests for deities was found in Goa<sup>148</sup>. In the case of *Vetal* the *priests* were *Guravs*, *Ghadi*, *Jalmi* or *Ravals* and those were non-*Brahmins*. Occasionally devotees of *Vetal* offer cocks, goats and buffaloes to him. In Pernem, Sanguem and Sattari talukas a hunted animal was offered to *Vetal* and was later shared among the devotees<sup>149</sup>. No elaborate *mantras* were necessary for the worship of *Vetal*. Therefore, a *Brahmin* priest well versed with the scriptures was not necessary. On the contrary, even where a *Chitpavan Brahmin* is acting as the priest of the *Vetal* shrine, the *Ghadi* or the *Jalmi* has remained indispensable for animal sacrifices which he had to supervise. The priests of the *Vetal* temple perform regular worship every day. However, according to *SKP Vetal* should be worshipped on every Tuesday. In addition to Tuesday *Vts* prescribes the 15th day of every dark fortnight (*Krishna paksha*) for the worship of *Vetal*<sup>150</sup>.

*Vetal* being the *grama devata* is the guardian of the village. According to the tradition, he moves throughout the village at night and keeps vigil on the property of the devotees. Hence, his sandals get worn out. The devotees take a vow and offer the sandals to *Vetal*. Such sandals can be noticed in the temple of *Vetal* from the village of Siroda and Assagaon of Sawantwadi<sup>151</sup>. In the *Vetal* temple of Poingunim village of Canacona taluka such sandals offered by the devotees to the deity are kept in a row. Annual fairs (*jatras*) are celebrated in many of the temples of *Vetal*. These festivities commence from *Asvina* (September-October) and continue upto *Phalguna* (March-April). In Adkon village of Ponda taluka, at the fair of *Vetal* which is held on *Kartika pournima* i.e. full moon day (October-November) a buffalo is offered. *Mahars* used to kill the buffalo traditionally in order to satisfy *Vetal* in the early hours of the morning<sup>152</sup>. In Kakoda temple of *Vetal* also, goats and buffaloes were offered<sup>153</sup>.

One of the rituals performed during the fair (*jatra*) has been self torture voluntarily accepted by the devotees of the gods and goddess. This self torture consisted of either fire walking or hook swinging.

There was a wide spread belief that this kind of self torture volunteered by the devotees immensely pleased the deity and the deity thereby protected the devotees from any kind of calamity such as epidemics or famine.

In front of the Paingini *Vetal* temple, two wooden posts have been permanently erected for the purpose of hook swinging regularly once in three years. But instead of a pole, provision is made to fix an iron wheel with four devotees. The devotees who undergo this torture are called *Gade*. Such devotees fast on the day of the hook swinging ceremony. These four *Gades* are given ceremonial bath. A document written on cloth in 1823 A.D. is read out and the iron hooks which are locally called *Gade* are pierced at the back. Of these four, the chief *gada* is called *Malgada* and an additional hook is pierced onto his back. They are garlanded and *Kumkum* (red colour) is applied to their forehead. They reach the wheel by means of a ladder and are tied to the wheel. The wheel is then rotated. After sometime the *Malgada* asks the people of the village who have assembled to witness the ceremony whether they are satisfied. Accordingly, they individually reply in positive and the *Gade* are helped to come down the wheel. Wives of the *gade* remove the nose ornaments (*nath*) which they had kept in the *Tulsi Vrindavan* and pray for their safe return<sup>154</sup>

*Vetal* as a folk deity has a chequered career. He was absorbed in the *Brahminical* pantheon after 1200 A.D. Even after his absorption, it has not altered his popular position as a *grama devata*. However, now a change is coming into his worship due to the spread of education, an awareness has been created against cruelty towards animals. As such there is a growing resentment against buffalo sacrifice. Still *Vetal* is a popular and a unique *grama devata* of Goa.

## J) PAIK

In some villages of Sanguem and Canacona talukas the monolithic sculptures of *Paik* are worshipped (Plate No, 17) *Paik* is shown as a horse rider and is a *parivar devata* in the shrines of the above talukas. There are various types of *Paiks* such as *Bagil Paik* (*Bagil* in Kannada means door. Thus he is the *Paik* at the door). *Gode Paik* (horse rider *Paik*) *Razon Paik* and *Kanna Paik* etc. As mentioned earlier the word