

Introduction

The common Sanskrit expressions referring to a directional guardian deity are “*lokapāla*” (guardian of the world in general, or of a particular world or sphere) or “*dikpāla*” (guardian of a specific direction), as well as a few related words. The canonical group of directional guardians consists of eight or ten members. The group of ten guardians consists of the following members, listed below with their common vehicles and attributes. In the group of eight (*aṣṭadikpālas*), the last two members have been omitted, and for the group of four *lokapālas*, popular in the early period, only the guardians of the four cardinal directions are represented:

Directional Guardian Simplified Characterization	Direction	Vehicle	Attributes
Indra King of Gods	east	elephant	thunderbolt
Agni God of Fire	south-east	goat	rosary and waterpot
Yama Lord of Death	south	buffalo	staff
Nairṛta Lord of Demons, also referred to as Nirṛti	south-west	<i>nara</i> (anthropoid)	sword
Varuṇa Lord of the Waters	west	<i>makara</i> (mythical aquatic animal)	noose
Vāyu God of the Wind or Air	north-west	antelope	billowing cloth or standard
Kubera Lord of Riches	north;	varying, mostly <i>nara</i> (anthropoid) or ram;	club;
or Soma , generally identical with Candra, the Moon God	<i>dto.</i>	varying	rosary and waterpot
Īśāna “Lord”, outwardly identical with Śiva	north-east	bull	trident
Brahmā Creator	zenith	goose	book
Ananta Serpent vehicle of Viṣṇu	nadir	tortoise	wheel

These gods, some of whom were also worshipped independently, were given the task of guarding particular parts of a temple. This protection against external evil forces functions within an intricate system of religious beliefs and ritual practices. During the early development of stone temple architecture in India, c. 5th through 8th centuries A.D., the probably already existing invisible, ritually invoked presence of directional guardians at building sites (section 2.1.2), was complemented by the visual representation of the deities in the form of stone panels in high relief. Apart from the depiction of *dikpālas* on temple exteriors, which is largely restricted to North India, the directional guardians can also be found on ceilings and other parts of the temple structure.

Theologically, the *dikpālas* represent a group of minor gods, subordinate to the main gods of Brāhmanism or Hinduism, with extensions into Buddhism and Jainism also. Their presence symbolizes space, and thus, their subordination signifies the main deity’s supremacy over the universe.

In the Indian subcontinent, the awareness of space was highly developed at an early period. The Vedic ritual practices (the early Vedic texts date from about 1500–1000 B.C.), in which the whole world was involved in ritual action, first led to the absolute orientation of these actions. The necessity to clearly differentiate between the directions resulted in the elaboration of their particular characteristics and their descriptions occurred in most of the earlier texts.

The allotment of specific deities to these categories of space was gradually modified, eventually resulting in a system of subtle differentiation of elemental realms, characters and functions among the directional guardians (**tables I–II**). However, several parallel versions of this system have always existed and continued to be described in the later Vedic texts (**tables III–VI**).

The development in the representation of *dikpālas*, which is first traceable from the two labelled guardian figures on the Buddhist *stūpa* at Bhārhut, c. 2nd century B.C. (section 2.1.1), was not a linear evolution, but a very complex process, consisting of several distinct main lines of development, a few of which ended abruptly (sections 2.1–2.3). Particularly during the early period of development, various concepts regarding the composition of the group must have existed side-by-side.

While emphasis is laid on the visual representation, a study of the literary concepts of the *dikpālas* from the time of their earliest pictorial representation (sections 1.3–1.4) is included here, thus enabling a comparative study of the literary and visual tradition. Although the number of texts including detailed iconographical descriptions of the *dikpāla* images is relatively small and the correspondence between text and image remains largely unclear, the textual study has assisted in the clarification of several problems and has afforded considerable information. It has not only facilitated in an interpretation of the sculptures, but has also highlighted the religious background and aided in the understanding of the contemporary artistic freedom.

The visual form of the directional guardians is composed of the usual features of Indian deities: their bodies exhibit signs of excellence, which are enhanced by jewellery; the headdress is elaborate; one or more attributes, usually carried in the hands, indicate the function and character of the deity; the vehicle of the god, or in its stead, a particular device below the god, indicates another aspect of his inherent nature. Less frequently, a consort or attendants accompany the deity.

The time limit of 1000 A.D. has been chosen here, since this is considered the tentative date for the introduction of the complete *dikpāla* set in the extreme south of India. Shortly before this date, in North India, the general introduction of four-armed *dikpālas* reveals a marked change of concept with new iconographical aspects, which is not included here. Thus, although the development differed greatly in the north and (extreme) south of the country, the date of 1000 A.D. has a special relevance in both regions.

Documentation and investigation of *dikpāla* representation is still little developed. In some publications, the *dikpālas* are treated in the same way as in an encyclopaedic work of the last century, J. DOWSON’s *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology & c.* (1879: 180). This historically rather late version, most probably following the *Mātaṅgalīlā*, prescribes elephants as vehicles for all the *dikpālas* as well as for their consorts. This concept, however, played no role in art.

In Indian art historical research during the 20th century, very few studies have been devoted to the subject of *dikpālas*. A profound article written by J.E. VAN LOHUIZEN-DE LEEUW: *The Dikpālakas in Ancient Java* (1955), lists some basic facts about *dikpālas* but is also rather speculative regarding a hypothetical early concept of *dikpālas* that existed in South India. Since then, however, no particular evidence has come up to prove this hypothesis.

During the last decades, a number of monographs have appeared, which contain sections on *dikpālas*. A limited number of articles has been devoted exclusively to the subject of *dikpālas*. However, these articles often deal with images only at particular

sites (H.C. DAS 1974; G. MICHELL 1973; Bh. SAHAI 1994; L.K. TRIPATHI 1965–66; D.N. VARMA 1988) or have a limited scope, *e.g.* not referring to any of the previous research works (S.B. SRIVASTAVA 1993–95). The rather large number of articles and other works on single members of the *dikpāla* group contain some interesting observations and other preliminary results (*e.g.*, K.D. BAJPAI 1997; L. VAN DEN BOSCH 1982; B.Ch. CHHABRA 1935; D. KLIMBURG-SALTER 1981; M.R. MAJUMDAR 1943; K.P. MERH 1996; P. PAL 1979; D.M. SRINIVASAN 1990). Another important step has been made by G. BHATTACHARYA (1987; 1990), who first distinguished between the usual group of directional guardians and a related group of deities, for which I have chosen the term “Manu Lokapālas”. Regarding the basic concept of space, a dynamic aspect of the generally static set-up of the regions has been recently traced by Hilde K. LINK (1999: 150–166).

The development of *dikpāla* representation in art has been briefly sketched by the authors of monographs (T. E. DONALDSON 1987; R.D. TRIVEDI 1990). Their attempts form the true beginnings of systematic research, as it has been undertaken in the present study.

An unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by R.P. GOSWAMI *Aṣṭādikpālas in Literature and Art* (1979) forms an admirable collection of literary and art historical facts on the Brāhmanical, Buddhist and Jaina versions of the *dikpāla* traditions, but lacks a comparative, analytical approach in its art section. It is tempting in Indian art history, to follow the traditional Indian approach by regarding the literary concepts as absolutely valid and therefore only evaluate, literally from case to case, in how far these have been realized in art. However, a truly analytical approach should critically highlight the relationship between text and image, without taking an unquestionable authority of the texts for granted.

In the present work, both in literature and art, data has been collected from a broad material basis. It was carefully analyzed and studied from different aspects. In the process of describing the art objects and evaluating the data, an unbiased position has been taken, *e.g.* by keeping literature and art apart and only treating them as parallel expressions of a specific tradition. Emphasis will be laid on the art tradition as a largely independent system, with its own potential for development. Even when a literary passage is mentioned during the discussion, it is treated only as kind of parallel evidence. In this connection, I refer to a passage from a study of the relationship between treatises on architecture and sculpture (*śilpāśāstras*) and works of art:

If we rely exclusively upon surviving shilpashastra texts to interpret Indian art, we shall never understand it, since these texts are manifestly those of a small group not composed of artists but of their social superiors, the priestly guardians of cultural tradition. [...] It is a culturally contextualising vehicle for a field of creativity which ran the risk of individualisation (how acutely perceived we do not know) and hence also the risk of a loss of cultural identity on the part of the individual artist [...] It supports, rather than censors art by not permitting it to be seen losing sight of its cultural vision. (T.S. MAXWELL 1989: 15)

The main section of the present study is formed by the chronologically arranged, analytical descriptions of the art works of specific regions of modern India. At the same time, subjects leading to a better understanding of the development and also cross-references will be included in order to form a coherent picture of the complex processes which were involved.

In the final, iconographic sections, the general modes of representation of the *dikpālas* will be described, followed by an individ-

ual treatment of the deities, with an emphasis on the particular types of their depiction, without categorizing too much.

Among the newly gathered information on the material, the considerable regional variation in the depiction of directional guardians (*i.e.* Central Indian *versus* Western Indian vehicles) has been particularly fascinating. Cases of regional development could be observed as well as cases of transfer or influence from one region to the other. To investigate whether any political systems were involved in the latter progress would lead too far in the present context. This aspect could form a subject for further study. However, a basic connection between the *dikpālas* and political power already exists, since a true sovereign has to hold sway over the directions.

In the present work, the regions of India are treated the following way:

Northern India	Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) <i>In a simplified manner, “North India” may also refer to all the regions north of the Deccan.</i>
Central India	Madhya Pradesh (M.P.)
Eastern India	Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, northern Andhra Pradesh
Deccan	Karnataka, southern part of Andhra Pradesh Southern India Tamilnadu, Kerala <i>In a simplified manner, “South India” may also refer to the Deccan, Tamilnadu and Kerala.</i>
Western India	Rajasthan, Gujarat

Spelling: For the transcription of site names, diacritical marks have been employed here to be as adequate as possible, although being aware of the shortcomings of this method. For the rendering of place names other than art historical sites, the diacritical marks have been omitted.

Figures: For the photographs of artworks illustrated here, previous publications, if any, of the respective piece have not been strictly referred to.

Directional reference: The direction which a *dikpāla* image faces is mentioned without brackets, while the direction implied, by the placement of the image near the respective corner of the wall facing that direction, is referred to in brackets. Thus, ‘north(-west)’ means ‘placed on the north wall, close to the northwestern corner.’

Map of India with Major Temple Sites



- 1 Ābānerī
- 2 Aihole
- 3 Ālampur
- 4 Amrol
- 5 Araḷaguppe
- 6 Bādāmi
- 7 Baḍoh
- 8 Bārambā
- 9 Barwāsāgar
- 10 Baṭesarā
- 11 Benisāgar
- 12 Bhavanāsi Saṅgam
- 13 Bhubaneswar
- 14 Bhūmarā
- 15 Bikkavolu
- 16 Bīṭhū
- 17 Caurāsi
- 18 Chatrārhi
- 19 Cittauḍgaḍh
- 20 Dāṅg
- 21 Deogaḍh

- 22 Dev Baruṅārak
- 23 Dharmapuri
- 24 Elephanta
- 25 Ellorā
- 26 Gallāvalli
- 27 Gaṇeśwarpur
- 28 Gaṅgaikōṇḍacōlapuram
- 29 Gwālīor
- 30 Indor
- 31 Kanauj
- 32 Kāñcīpuram
- 33 Kheḍ
- 34 Kuḍaveli

- 35 Lāmbā
- 36 Mahākūṭa
- 37 Masrur
- 38 Mathurā
- 39 Muṇḍeśvarī Hill
- 40 Nāgaraj
- 41 Nālandā
- 42 Nārāyaṇapuram
- 43 Osiān
- 44 Pāhārpur
- 45 Palārī
- 46 Paṭṭadakal
- 47 Pawāyā
- 48 Pīpāḍ
- 49 Pratakoṭa
- 50 Satyavolu
- 51 Tañjāvūr
- 52 Tirukkaḍaiyūr
- 53 Tirunelveli
- 54 Umri
- 55 Vārāṇasī