

MULTIPLE ROLES OF DOGS IN INDIA – culture, art and the colonial context

Dogs have an ambivalent status in Indian culture. On the one hand, they were one of the first animals to be domesticated, since when they have been a regular companion of man. They are also a divine steed, a companion of the ascetics, and even the goddess Durga has been described as having a dog's head. On the other hand, they are often viewed as an unclean creature that should not be kept in homes. Observing the streets of Indian cities, one may notice countless homeless dogs, which people do not usually treat in a particularly friendly way. So what is the truth about the dog's role in India? This issue is quite complex and should be traced from a historical as well as topical perspective.

DOGS IN ANTIQUITY

The oldest traces of dogs' involvement in people's lives stem from prehistoric times. In the paintings discovered in Bhimbetka (Burzahom archaeological site, Kashmir Valley) – from the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods – there are many depictions of dogs such as: Sighthound, Scent-Hunters, Shepherd Dogs and Giant Dogs.¹⁾ A dog is also featured in the Neolithic paintings discovered in Burzahom, Kashmir. As B.M. Pande remarks: “the height and length of the dog, which evidently is a member of the hunting party, are both

¹⁾ Mathpal (1984).

6 cm, and has distinctly long, straight ears, long legs, and curved tail.”²⁾ Even on the basis of these two preserved examples, it can be concluded that dog has accompanied man since the dawn of time and was particularly helpful when it came to hunting. In Burzahom, the remains of dogs were also found lying in tombs. Dogs it seems held a special status in the Burzahom culture. Dogs, wolves and Ibex seemed to have held a special significance as burial pits containing their skeletons have been found. More interestingly a couple of burial pits have been discovered where the dog is buried right next to the master within the compounds of the dwelling units. There is even an instance of dogs buried in two layers one above another.³⁾

From the period of the Indus Valley Civilisation, some representations of dogs have survived that indicate their high level of domestication: they wear collars and are sometimes depicted in poses that may indicate that they were very close to people (e.g. retrieving, sitting on 2 hind legs)⁴⁾ (Fig. 1). The fact that they were domesticated may also be proved by the fact that some dog bones were also found during archaeological research. At the archaeological site in Ropar, the remains of a dog were discovered buried alongside a person, which undoubtedly indicates its great importance in the life of the owner.

DOGS IN THE VEDIC PERIOD

During the Vedic period, dogs were also valued, as evidenced by references, even in the most sacred texts of the Rigveda). In other passages, they are even referred to as Vastopati – protector of the house (X.108. 1–11).⁵⁾ The way they are mentioned also puts them on a par with the other occupants of the house “Let the mother sleep; let the father sleep; let the dog sleep; let the master of the house sleep. Let all the kinsmen sleep; let our people all around sleep.” (VII, 55, 5).⁶⁾ Analysing the status of dogs in the Vedas, Edward Washburn Hopkins remarks: “on investigating the matter we learn that in the Rig-Veda the dog is the companion and the protector and probably the inmate of his

²⁾ Pande (1971: 136).

³⁾ <https://travelthehimalayas.com/kiki/burzahom-ancient-kashmir-and-its-dogs>

⁴⁾ Marshall (1931).

⁵⁾ Krishna (2018: 191).

⁶⁾ The Rig Veda (2005: 550).

house; a friend so near that he pokes his too familiar head into the dish; and has be struck aside as a selfish creature (...) He is never spoken of with scorn, and is deprecated only when he barks or offends by too great eagerness-and then against him implies familiarity rather than contempt.”⁷⁾

A dog called Sarama, Indra’s companion and his loyal assistant, is also mentioned in the Rigveda. Her children, on the other hand, are related to the god of death – Yama – and are frightening in appearance. Similarly, dogs are mentioned in the Atharwaveda, where they are described, inter alia, as Rudra’s companions – they were supposed to have large mouths, make terrifying sounds and were saluted.⁸⁾

An increasingly ambivalent attitude towards dogs emerges in the Upanishads. This is clearly seen in the Chandogya Upanishad, for example. On the one hand, it is written that a deity or sage took the form of a white dog. “A white dog appeared before him; and other dogs, gathering round that dog, said: Sir, please sing food for us; really we are hungry.”⁹⁾ The animal figures are interpreted as follows: “Being pleased with the learning (...). a deity, or a sage, took the shape of the dog, and thus was it that a white dog appeared-i.e. was made to appear-before him-i.e. for the purpose of bestowing a favour upon him. Other dogs-smaller ones-gathering round that dog said to him, “Sir, please sing food for us – i.e. secure food for us by means of singing.” The right meaning to be deduced from all this is that speech and the rest, being partakers of food “in the wake of Breath”, said this to tho breath in the mouth; the idea being that being pleased with Vedic learning, they would help the breath through their own forms. “Really we are hungry.”¹⁰⁾ Another passage says that “those who have been of bad conduct here attain evil birth, the birth of a dog, the birth of a hog, or the birth of Chandala.”¹¹⁾ Thus, the dog in this sense was a sinful man in a previous incarnation.

⁷⁾ Hopkins (1894: 155).

⁸⁾ Krishna (2018: 192).

⁹⁾ Chandogya Upanishad (1942: 65).

¹⁰⁾ Chandogya Upanishad (1942: 65).

¹¹⁾ Chandogya Upanishad (1942: 269).

DOGS IN THE EPICS, DHARMASHASTRA AND PURANAS

In the great Indian epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata – dogs also appear in different contexts and the attitude towards these animals may be perceived as rather positive (in the Ramayana, a brahmin was punished for beating a dog). The novelty that arises there is a prohibition on eating dog meat. There is also a belief in the Mahabharata that dogs are the last animal incarnation in which those who sinned in previous incarnations may be born, before transferring to their first human form – as untouchables. So if the individual falls to an animal level of existence, the dog is generally his last subhuman incarnation.¹²⁾

A drastic change in the approach to dogs is evident in the brahminical tradition, especially in the texts on dharma. There, these animals are given the lowest possible status. As Wendy Doniger remarks “to the Indian, the dog is the most unclean of all animals, a polluted scavenger, the very image of evil”¹³⁾. Dogs appear in a number of contexts that indicate their contaminating nature. Although dogs kept for sport and entertainment were mentioned in the Manusmriti, their guardians were called Chandals, or non-caste, i.e. unclean. In the authors’ opinion, this procedure of juxtaposing unclean people with dogs was widespread. In such cases, reference was made especially to menstruating women and the aforementioned Chandals, as well as to the Shudras sometimes. The restrictions covered many areas. One of the most important was eating – food had to be clean and even the gaze, let alone the touch, of a dog would make the food unfit for consumption. “Neither a ‘Fierce’ Untouchable, nor a pig, a cock, a dog, a menstruating woman, or an impotent man should be watching the priests dine.”¹⁴⁾ Likewise with offerings, in no way could they come into contact with dogs or unclean people. Dogs could also significantly disturb devout study of the Vedas – it was preferable to discontinue reading the sacred texts if the reader heard a dog barking, and also it “should be known that there is to be no recitation for a day and night when a sacrificial animal, frog, cat, dog, snake, mongoose, or rat passes between (teacher and student).”¹⁵⁾ In addition to this type of restriction, there were also penalties that could be meted out for sins committed, one of the

¹²⁾ White (1991: 87).

¹³⁾ Doniger O’Flaherty (1988: 173).

¹⁴⁾ The Laws of Manu (1992: 214).

¹⁵⁾ The Laws of Manu (1992: 249).

worst of which was to be reborn in the next incarnation in the form of a dog. A dog's bite was also a punishment, "If a woman who is proud of her relatives or her own qualities deceives her husband (with another man), the king should have her eaten by dogs in a place frequented by many people".¹⁶⁾

Despite such a negative attitude towards these animals, they were still used for hunting. Moreover, "Manu has said that the meat of an animal killed by dogs or killed by carnivores or by aliens such as 'Fierce' Untouchables is unpolluted."¹⁷⁾ Those from a high caste, however, did not keep dogs on their estate.¹⁸⁾ This was only allowed for non-caste people living outside the village boundaries: "the dwellings of 'Fierce' Untouchables and 'Dog-cookers' should be outside the village; they must use discarded bowls, and dogs and donkeys should be their wealth."¹⁹⁾ It was also believed that appropriate penance should be performed for killing a dog.

An analogous attitude towards dogs is presented in the Puranas. They are usually perceived as unclean animals, living outside the settlements where the brahmin lived, mainly used by people for hunting. It was also forbidden to eat their meat, and sinners were frightened by the assertion that in the next life they would be born as dogs. Moreover, the Bhagavata Purana mentions that dogs also tortured people in hell.²⁰⁾ Skanda Purana writes about 55 circles of hell, one of which is called Shvabhajana, which means that the sinner is subjected to this kind of torture.²¹⁾ It was also widely believed that dogs have a contaminating effect on meals, offerings, and ceremonies (e.g. funeral rites).²²⁾ Very often certain other comparisons are encountered that are familiar from the dharmashastras, such as, for example, juxtaposing dogs, non-caste people and menstruating women e.g. "An article of food, such as boiled rice etc, prepared on a previous day or night, or partaken of by another, or touched by a dog, or sprinkled over with water by a morally degraded person, or polluted by the touch of a woman in her menses, or squeezed by another, or smelled by a cow, or eaten by a bird, or trampled down with foot, should be

¹⁶⁾ The Laws of Manu (1992: 406).

¹⁷⁾ The Laws of Manu (1992: 290).

¹⁸⁾ Debroy (2008: 160).

¹⁹⁾ The Laws of Manu (1992: 495).

²⁰⁾ Debroy (2008: 168).

²¹⁾ Debroy (2008: 168).

²²⁾ Debroy (2008: 171).

shunned, as impure and unwholesome.²³⁾ Despite such a negative attitude in the texts, not everyone treated them in this way and researchers analysing the issue noticed that: “animals like dog, and cat and birds like parrots and peacocks were kept as pets by people (...) are also reflected in faunal as well as literary sources.”²⁴⁾

DOGS IN DIVINATION AND ASTROLOGY

Dogs, despite all the negative brahminical attitude towards these animals, were often considered to be extraordinary creatures that had a special contact with the spiritual world. They were also considered as the keepers and, as it were, intermediaries between the world of the living and the dead, guarding the gates of both heaven and hell. In this context, they accompany Yama, the god of death. One account that explains the extraordinary abilities of dogs tells the story that once humans and dogs had the ability to see the gods. One day, however, Shiva smeared people’s eyes and henceforth they lost this skill, yet dogs retained it.²⁵⁾ From these beliefs that the dog is a creature, as it were, on the border of two worlds, comes the belief that their behaviour can reveal a lot of information about present and future events.

Fortune telling from various signs is widespread in India. The character and predisposition of a person are determined by his appearance and various elements on the body (*Samudrika Shastra*). Sages would also analyse the behaviour of animals upon which to base their predictions for the future, both immediate and distant. In this aspect, particular attention was paid to dogs. Such descriptions are found in various literary works. Systematic considerations on this matter gradually emerged from the beginning of our era. One such work is the *Brihat Samhita* (“Great Compendium”) of Varahamihira which, although largely devoted to astrology, also contains lengthy passages on how to interpret animal behaviour, and particularly how to predict future events by observing the behaviour of urinating dogs. Interpellations of dogs’ behaviour, urination included, were also mentioned in the *Manasollasa* (“Splendor of the Mental Faculties”, 12th century), an encyclopaedic work attributed to King Bhulokamalla Someshvara or “Sharangadhara Paddhati”

²³⁾ The *Garuda Puranam* (1908: 279).

²⁴⁾ Bedekar, Joglekar, Bhat, Bedekar, Joglekar, Bhat (2016: 207, 211).

²⁵⁾ Debroy (2008: 226).

(“Sharngadhara’s Guidebook”, 14th century).²⁶⁾ It is noticeable that many of these signs are extremely inauspicious. David Gordon White made several fundamental points. First, the urinating dog is associated with a person who is defined by movement – a traveler. “Second, there is a clear distinction made between omens issuing from the dog’s passage through: (1) what is clearly an auspicious outside setting (milky tree), such as the tamed forest or a hermitage; (2) an inauspicious outside setting (poisonous tree), such as the wilderness or the world at the end of an age, and (3) the ordered inside space of the household. In the first outside case, all the omens are auspicious; in the third, in which the dog urinates on household items, and finally on a family cow, the results are extremely dire: the soilure of the women of the house, and ultimately miscegenation with an outcaste.”²⁷⁾

Dogs also appear in the context of astrology. They are related to the planet Khetu, which is supposed to have a negative impact on people. It is believed that “dogs being Man’s best companions do not give up the biting instinct which is hidden in their traits and comes out at some point of time, the same as Kethu inflicting a native badly if afflicted. An afflicted Kethu is as bad as a mad dog for the native” and also “Dogs show affection and loyalty only towards its owner/master, which is just as Kethu loyal only to Guru/Jupiter (Master). A malefic Kethu posited in a birth chart can be nullified or reduced only by Jupiter’s aspect/conjunct.”²⁸⁾ One way to mitigate these bad influences is believed to be by feeding black dogs. This activity is also thought to satisfy Shani Dev, who is the god of Saturn. This planet is supposed to cause many problems in human life like delays in getting a job, stunted growth in business and many other obstacles in life and all of them can be avoided just by feeding a black dog. This activity is best done on Saturday as this day is dedicated to Saturn.²⁹⁾

A further disadvantage would be to have Mangal Dosh (Mars) in one’s horoscope. For a woman, one of the drawbacks is the belief that her first husband is bound to die. To prevent this, it is sometimes customary to marry a dog, who is then considered to be the first husband and will protect any

²⁶⁾ White (1995: 797).

²⁷⁾ White (1991: 92).

²⁸⁾ Neelam Gopinath, What is the link between dogs and Rahu/Ketu in astrology? <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-link-between-dogs-and-Rahu-Ketu-in-astrology/>.

²⁹⁾ <https://www.ancientastrologytalks.com/benefits-of-feeding-dogs-in-astrology/>.

future human spouse from this fate in the future. Magical activities involving the participation of dogs alleviate the negative predispositions with which a given person was born, and may prove helpful in everyday life.

DOGS AND THE DIVINE

The dog is also a companion and steed for several gods. As mentioned, as early as in Vedic times was Indra described as having a faithful, divine pet – Sarama – who is considered as the mother of all dogs, and her four-eyed descendants accompanied Yama, the god of death. As Wendy Doniger notes: “they may be four-eyed in the sense of sharp-sighted or in reference to the round spots situated above their eyes.³⁰⁾”

Above all, Bhairava (Fig. 2), a dangerous form of Shiva, and Bhikshatana – an ascetic, considered an intermediate form between gentle and dangerous – is associated with dogs. Most often they accompany the god, instead of his typical hesitant, ie the bull Nandin. Sometimes black dogs are considered as an incarnation of Bhairava. They are usually shown running around him or licking the blood from Brahma’s severed head. In modern times, there are also representations where Bhairava rides a dog, but these are much rarer. It is believed that one of the cornerstones of god worship is care devoted to dogs. This should be done especially at the Kala Bhairava Birthday (Kala Bhairava Jayanthi, December). According to myth, if one feeds hungry dogs with sweet bread, then our problems can be overcome automatically. This his act is believed to dissolve our sins and bad karma³¹⁾. As mentioned, dogs in the brahminical tradition were considered to be one of the lowest and most polluting creatures with whom the untouchables were compared. Therefore, many people outside the caste system began to worship Bhairava. Similar comparisons were also made with women, especially during menstruation. This is also one of the reasons why this god also came to be considered the protector and helper of women. The story of his despair after the loss of his beloved wife Sita, when she died in flames to save his honour, also contributed to this. He took the form of a dangerous ascetic and moved with the body of his wife. Bhairava’s relationship with women is especially evident

³⁰⁾ The Rig Veda (2005: 82).

³¹⁾ <https://www.astroved.com/articles/why-should-we-do-dog-feeding-on-kala-bhairava-ashtami>.

on the day when he is to be worshiped. According to tradition, this is Friday, especially at midnight. The day is also dedicated to the Mother Goddess and that time is optimal for worshipping her divine manifestations.

Dogs are also faithful companions of Dattatreya (Fig. 3). This deity is most often seen as the embodiment of Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), or as an avatar of Vishnu. He is shown as an ascetic living in a remote area, with 3 heads (sometimes belonging to different deities) and holding attributes such as a water vessel, a conch, a trident or a club, accompanied by four dogs and a cow. These animals have their own symbolic meaning – dogs are interpreted as the embodiment of the 4 Vedas and the cow as mother earth, feeding all creatures.³²⁾ In the mythology and iconography of Dattatreya, dogs gained divine status and are the embodiment of the most sacred books of Hinduism.

The goddess Hadkai Mata (also called Hadaksha, Hadkabai, Hulan) is directly associated with dogs – in fact, she rides one as her vahana (Fig. 4). She is the patron and healer of rabies. Its cult is widespread especially in Gujarat, where there is a high risk of this disease due to the burgeoning population of wild dogs. Rabies-stricken people are taken to Hadkai Mata's shrine where they vow to give up rice, sugar and coconuts, besides bathing and cold foods, for one-and-a-half months. Some smaller hospitals near Ahmedabad feature shrines to the Goddess with a particular mandate.³³⁾ The goddess is shown sitting on a dog, usually holding certain attributes such as a trident, a sword and a damaru drum; she is also often accompanied by dogs.

A dog is also the vahana of the god Kshetrapala. He is a guardian deity, who was originally a deity of the farmland, particularly in South India. It is mentioned in the texts that he is associated with dogs³⁴⁾ and that is how he is depicted in some works of art. He is often associated with Shiva and his places of worship are sometimes located within the grounds of Shiva temples, and sometimes he is completely identified with Bhairava.

Dogs are also associated with the god Khandoba (Fig. 5), who is considered an incarnation of Shiva and the patron deity of the Marathas, especially the warrior, farming and herding castes, including the Bhonsle clan to which Shivaji belonged. He was originally a folk deity, worshipped in Jejuri, Maharashtra, in the 9th–10th centuries. Later, his story was incorporated as

³²⁾ Werness (2006: 138).

³³⁾ <https://sarmaya.in/objects/indigenous-tribal-art/mata-ni-pachedi-hadkai-mata/>.

³⁴⁾ Rao (1916: 496).

the “Malhari Mahatmya” in the Brahmanda Purana around the 15th–16th centuries, along with the Sanskritization of the deity.³⁵⁾ Khandoba is depicted as a warrior who rides a bull or a horse and is accompanied by a dog. The dog in this case is his faithful companion, helper and protector.

Entire holy places were also devoted to dogs. One example is the Kukkura Math temple in Dindori (9th–10th century). The legend associated with this place runs as follows:

“A banjara tradesman, Lakhirama, used to own a dog. He was in need of money and borrowed some from the local king, Kokadeva, leaving his dog with the king as collateral. One night, there was a theft in the palace. The dog witnessed this and in the morning, tugged at the king’s clothes and dragged him towards a nearby pond. When the pond was dredged, the stolen goods were found. The king was delighted. He wrote a chit to the Lakhirama, telling him that he was so delighted that he had freed the banjara from his debt. This chit was tied to the dog’s neck and the dog was sent off to his master. Meanwhile, Lakhirama headed towards the king, with money to pay off the debt. The dog and the master met mid-way. But Lakhirama was furious because he thought that the dog had run away from the king. He killed the dog and only then did he discover the chit around the neck. Lakhirama erected a tomb in the dog’s memory and prayed to Shankara so that he might be freed from his sins. Rina Mukteshvara Mandir is so named because of the banjara’s debt to the king, and to the dog. The temple to Shankara exists there and so does the dog’s tomb, about a hundred metres from the temple.”³⁶⁾

Another interesting Dog Temple is in Channapatna, Karnataka. The temple was constructed by a rich businessman Ramesh in the year 2010. As per the villagers, once two dogs mysteriously disappeared from the village. A few days later, the main deity of the village, Goddess Kempamma herself appeared in someone’s dream and asked them to build a temple for the lost dogs close to hers for the protection of the village and the villagers. Based on the vision, the dog temple was constructed and two lost dogs are worshipped here. Inside the temple one can see statues of two dogs, and villagers now believe that these dogs continuously watch out for them and drive the negative energy

³⁵⁾ Krishna (2018: 201–202).

³⁶⁾ Debroy (2008: 227–228).

away. Every year, a huge festival is held in the village in the honour of these guard dogs³⁷⁾.

Besides this, in India there are sacred places dedicated to dogs. One of them is the Bhairava Temple (Chipiyana Buzurg, Ghaziabad)³⁸⁾, which features the tomb of a sacred dog. It is believed that anyone bitten by a dog who visits this place will be protected from contracting rabies. Mohan Bharadwa, the temple priest, says, "People come to offer prayers at the temple from different parts of the country, and even from Nepal. It is believed that dog is Baba Kall Bhairav's 'savari'."³⁹⁾

Dogs also occupy a special place in the Shree Muthappan Temple, Parassinikadavu, Kannur. The presence of these animals is not only allowed, but even most welcome. It is believed that Muthappan used to have a dog companion for his journey and that is how dogs came to enjoy a special place in the temple today. The temple regards dogs as sacred creatures and this fact is very well highlighted at the entrance itself. The main temple is neatly defended by two fierce looking statue of dogs installed to keep watch over the pilgrims and the visitors. Besides these, one also encounters a large number of bronze dogs guarding the sanctum.⁴⁰⁾

DOGS IN EARLY AND MEDIEVAL INDIAN ART

Dogs appear on many works of early Indian art, especially Buddhist. On one of the oldest examples – the Bharhut stupa – dogs are depicted as man's companion. They appear on a panel illustrating Uda Jataka – the rishi is shown with a bowl of fish, with cats fighting for their heads, while one dog views the whole situation, and another walks away with a fragment of fish in its mouth.

³⁷⁾ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/destinations/do-you-know-about-the-channapatna-dog-temple-in-karnataka/as65609824.cms>, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/most-unusual-temples-in-india-280922-2015-07-06>; <https://www.101india.com/travel-food/search-dog-god-channapatna>.

³⁸⁾ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ghaziabad/dog-bite-ghaziabads-bhairav-temple-offers-divine-remedy/articleshow/64843170.cms>.

³⁹⁾ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ghaziabad/dog-bite-ghaziabads-bhairav-temple-offers-divine-remedy/articleshow/64843170.cms>.

⁴⁰⁾ <https://www.myyatradiary.com/2013/05/temples-of-kerala-shree-muthappan.html>.

Dogs also appear in the Buddhist context on a panel from Gandhara (White Dog Barking at Buddha, Jamalgarhi, Gandhara, Indian Museum, Kolkata) (Fig. 6). It is an illustration of a scene from the life of Buddha – he was supposed to visit a merchant’s house, whose dog greeted him with barking, and then sat down sadly and huddled in a corner. The owner grew concerned about his pet’s condition and asked Buddha to explain the situation, including the dog’s previous lives and how to improve his karma. The panel presents a disproportionately large dog in relation to the other characters. With this treatment, the artist emphasised the role of the animal in the whole story – the viewer’s attention is drawn towards its oversize form.

Dogs also appear in Buddhist paintings in the Ajanta Caves, in the illustration of Mriga Jataka. In this story, a Golden Deer saved the life of the son of a wealthy merchant, who wanted to commit suicide after squandering all his fortune. The son promised not to reveal the whereabouts of the unusual animal. However, tempted by the promise of wealth, he led the king to his home, but just as he was about to kill the animal, it spoke up. The ruler wanted to punish the unfaithful informant for almost leading him to slaughter a sacred deer, but the animal requested that the son be shown mercy. The picture shows dogs as part of the king’s hunting party. Thus it is evident that despite the low status given to dogs in the brahminical tradition, they belonged to the very close circle of the rulers and often accompanied them on hunting expeditions.

The great importance of dogs is also evidenced by the fact that they appear on the walls of medieval Hindu temples. One of them is the Veerabhadra temple in Lepakshi (Andhra Pradesh). One of the murals shows a family walking with their pet.

Of particular interest in this context is the painting on the ambulatory of the Rajarajeswaram temple in Thanjavur (1003 and 1010 AD) presenting a white dog of a breed researchers have identified as Alangu⁴¹⁾ (Fig. 7). It was supposed to be “It is a big hunting dog, about 27 inches (69 cm) tall, with heavy, well-muscled limbs. Its ears are pricked, its back long, and its tail tapers to a fine point (...) When it is not employed on its hunting duties, it is also enlisted as a fearsome watchdog.⁴²⁾” Unfortunately, this breed is already

⁴¹⁾ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/chola-mural-tells-a-tale-of-dog/article6498185.ece>.

⁴²⁾ Desmond (2002: 326).

extinct, so this mural is extremely interesting because it shows a species of dog that no longer exists, and by placing its image in the temple, it testifies to its great importance and the respect it commanded.

DOGS IN MINIATURE PAINTING

Dogs were very often bred at the courts of both Mughal and Indian rulers. They were used primarily for hunting, which was one of the favourite pastimes of the rulers. In such contexts, they most often appear in miniature painting – in the entourage of a king either setting off on, or returning from, a hunt, or actively accompanying him while hunting. An example of such a work is the portrait of Maharana Ari Singh from Udaipur (1761) – the ruler is shown on a horse, in the middle of a retinue consisting of servants and dogs.⁴³⁾ Interestingly, the animals were depicted in the most natural way among the entire group – they are presented in dynamic poses, their mouths facing each other, as if communicating. The portrait of Bhim Singh while hunting (Udaipur, 1799) is similar.⁴⁴⁾ Both the king and his entourage are conventional in appearance, while the dog attacking a wild boar is highly individualised. It seems that it was in the painting of these animals that the artists could allow themselves a great deal of freedom – they were not held back by any conventions (such as when portraying rulers or their wives). So, paradoxically, dogs were often the most interesting element of the painting.

Some rulers appreciated their pets so much that they even had their official portraits painted with them. An example of such a work is the portrait of the Raja Medini Pal of Basohli (c. 1730), who, in a manner traditional for the Pahari region, appeared in a sitting posture holding a water pipe.⁴⁵⁾ What distinguishes this painting from others of this type is the presence of his favourite dog. The animal was therefore probably particularly close to the ruler, in that he chose him as a companion in his official portrait.

Some rulers valued their dogs so much that they urged artists to make their very own portraits. Particularly numerous works of this type were created in the principality of Ajmer, and especially in the Sawar and Mewar

⁴³⁾ National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Topsfield (1980: 110).

⁴⁴⁾ National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Topsfield (1980: 138).

⁴⁵⁾ National Museum, New Delhi, Archer (1973: *passim*).

centres (and mostly in the Devgarh centre). An example of such a work is the image of a female dog with her offspring (Ajmer, probably Sawar, ca. 1780)⁴⁶. The animals are shown very intimately, with the artist trying to reflect their individuality and emotions. Additionally, the use of a plain background focuses the attention of the viewer entirely on the canine mother and her puppies. An example of a work from Mewar is a Udaipur miniature (1762) of a Saluki hunting hound⁴⁷ – characterised for hunting primarily by sight rather than scent (Fig. 8). They were highly valued in royal courts because of their hunting skills and were very expensive. Owning such a pet was restricted so it was generally for the well-off. The aforementioned miniature, which is a portrait of a dog, was created as a series of the ruler's court animals, including the most valuable of all animals, i.e. elephants. Such an image showed the tremendous importance that the dog had for the ruler.

The group of portraits also include works in which dogs were shown with their handler. One example of this type of work comes from Kishangarh and depicts two large hunting dogs kept on a leash by their handler (Fig. 9). The figures of the animals appear to be scaled up because they are as tall as the man. This method of composition emphasised the importance and significance of the pets for the person who commissioned the painting.

At the rulers' courts, dogs were also sometimes used to entertain palace ladies. Sometimes there are scenes in the paintings depicting women at play with domesticated animals, including dogs decorated with special collars on their necks, whose antics added a touch of refreshment to life in the confines spaces of the *zanana*. One example of such a work is a miniature from Bundi, which shows the following scene: here is the lady of the court, holding a parrot in her hand, chasing a cat that probably scared the bird, while next to her, a faithful dog helps her mistress chase away the unruly predator⁴⁸. All animals are domesticated – the bird perches nicely on the woman's hand, while the cat and dog are collared. So they were clearly all pets of a high-ranking lady.

Dogs were also often faithful companions of high-ranking people at the courts of rulers. They also happened to commission portraits of themselves in the company of their pets. One example of such a work is a miniature

⁴⁶ Leach (1986:163–164).

⁴⁷ Zbiory prywatne, Simon Ray (2014: 57–58).

⁴⁸ 1750–1775, National Museum New Delhi, Sodhi (1999: 132–133).

showing a Muslim dignitary, probably Muhammad Ali (Fig. 10). Analysing this work, it is clear that it is the figure of the dog that dominates the composition – proportionally it is very large in relation to the male figure, and its colour also stands out in the foreground. Seen from this perspective, the dog is as important in the painting as its owner.

In miniature painting, dogs also appear as companions of itinerant ascetics and holy men. This is often related to the belief, as mentioned earlier, that they are the companions of the two great divine ascetics in the Indian tradition, namely Shiva as Bhairava and Dattatrya. So the ascetics, had their own great divine counterparts, who were accompanied by dogs. Miniatures depicted men and women who devoted their lives to prayer and meditation. One image of this type is that of an ascetic sitting near her hut in a logical position, accompanied by a dog (Fig. 11). The scene takes place in a remote area, among hills, near woodland and a lotus pond. The entire work exudes an atmosphere of tranquility, spirituality, meditation and retreat. A much different picture of ascetics is shown in a miniature by Svarupa Rama. Here a group of three ascetics are shown in quite animated poses, near the palace buildings. One of the men is playing with a bird in his hand, while the others are enjoying the company of four dogs, which seem to enjoy their presence and seem to be very close to them.⁴⁹⁾

Often, a dog was also added as a kind of attribute of a European. This tendency would intensify during the colonial period, but the beginnings of this concept may be already observed in miniature painting at the courts of rulers. Examples of such works are paintings from Udajpur, where, since the visit of J.J. Ketelaar (a leader of Dutch East India Company officers) at the court in Mewar in 1711, men of European appearance, mainly wearing Dutch clothes, were often depicted. One of them shows a European of Dutch appearance, accompanied by a small, white dog (ca. 1715–1720).⁵⁰⁾

In a similar context, dogs sometimes appear in humorous painting as a kind of European addition. Particularly interesting, and also rather puzzling, is a group of works showing people smiling, with a characteristic finger-over-the-mouth gesture, ordering silence. One of them shows two European men in such poses, accompanied by a child and a man bitten by a snake (Mewar,

⁴⁹⁾ Rajasthan, Mewar, Devgarh, 1780–1800, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

⁵⁰⁾ National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Topsfield (1980: 69).

1760)⁵¹). This hand movement, the meaningful facial expressions, as well as the depiction of the characters in a strange embrace as if colluding in some entertaining, or even indecent, secret are all impressive features. They are accompanied by a small, amused dog. However, the exact meaning of these characters is not entirely clear.

DOGS IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The colonial period brought about a significant change in the perception of dogs. With the increasing presence of the British in India, the inhabitants of the subcontinent had more and more contact with British customs, including their love of dogs. These animals were often treated almost as members of the family and cared for very dearly. They accompanied the men while hunting and carrying out administrative duties, and were faithful companions for the women. British ladies often kept their pets at home, and they would provide entertainment and companionship during the many lonely moments of their lives. In one painting entitled *The Breakfast*, illustrating the life of a British family in India, the relationship between the lady of the house and her favourite dog is clearly shown⁵² (Fig. 12). As the title suggests, the scene shows breakfast; the home is decorated in accordance with the British fashion, while the lord and lady of the house are also dressed in western clothes. At the woman's feet rests a small dog that gazes happily towards his mistress, who pampers him by feeding him food from the table. Interestingly, the woman is not inclined towards her husband, but towards the pet, as if emphasising that he is her faithful companion.

Dogs were sometimes viewed by the British as the most faithful friends and companions. A clear example of this attitude is Margaret Cotter Morison, whose beloved bulldog Jones helped her endure the time when she was alone⁵³ (Fig. 13). She had such great affection for him that she included a picture of him in her memories. It is worth emphasising that the photo of the dog features there twice, the first one appearing on the title page. Each time he is shown in portrait – his character dominates the entire representation,

⁵¹) Philadelphia Museum of Art, Mason (2001: il. 63).

⁵²) Tayler (1842: ili. 3).

⁵³) Morison 1904.

which clearly emphasises the important role he played during the entire escapade.

Indian artists working during the colonial period reacted quickly to British customs. And so the first traditional artists who made works commissioned by Western recipients, i.e. artists working in the style of Company Painting, often combined the image of a British man with his favourite pet. Moreover, often the dog would become a kind of attribute of people from Europe, not only from Great Britain. An example of such a work is a painting showing a French officer with his servant (Fig. 14). At the feet of the European, the artist depicted a small dog in a playful pose, which could indicate that it was a Frenchman's domestic pet. Dogs were also the subject of independent creations. One example is the work of Shaikh Muhammad Amir, who specialised in depicting the houses and domestic staff of British suburbanites. The painting shows the two dogs sitting in the compound of a house. The dog standing on the left is General, a Feathered Saluki. On the right is the bitch, Aiyar, a Smooth Saluki (Fig. 15). The animals are shown in the landscape, but its proportionally smaller size significantly emphasises the presented figures.

Indian artists who received their education in European artistic techniques also introduced the dog theme into their works. Worth of note among the early artists of this type is Gangaram Cintaman Tambat, a Maratha artist who created many works commissioned by Charles Warre Malet (1753–1815) of the Bombay Civil Service. The British Malet persuaded the Peshwa to establish a school for drawing in the palace at Poona and Gangaram seems to have been trained there in European techniques. In addition to his animal drawings, he was employed by Malet to sketch Hindu architecture to illustrate Malet's writings.⁵⁴⁾ The album made by Gangaram Cintaman Tambat at the request of the British also includes some interesting images of dogs. The artist devoted a great deal of attention to showing their individual features, and it is clear that these are portraits of real animals. One example is a painting entitled "A light brown saluki. Chuba a Dog belonging to CWM" which shows a light-coloured dog with a dark face, whose individuality is additionally emphasised by an inscription, indicating that this was a personal pet of Charles Warre Malet (Fig. 16).

⁵⁴⁾ <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2014/08/the-maratha-artist-gangaram-cintaman-tambat.html>.

However, not only Indian artists working for a Western audience embraced the subject of dogs. One of the greatest artists of the colonial period, considered to be the father of modern Indian art – Raja Ravi Varma – also included these animals in his works. Analysing his oeuvre of this type, some very interesting conclusions arise. One example is his famous work, *Here Comes Papa*⁵⁵⁾ (Fig. 17). The painting shows a woman holding a child in her arms, accompanied by a dog. According to the description given by the artist, she is expecting the arrival of her husband who, although not visible in the work, has already arrived home, and the lady of the house can make her way immediately to the temple. A closer look at this work reveals that only the dog's posture indicates that the master of the house is approaching the mother and child. Indeed, the pet is depicted with pricked ears, an alert posture, turned towards the left of the group of people, as if he had already seen and sensed the man approaching. To create this work, the artist used a photograph of his daughter and granddaughter – interestingly, there is no dog there.⁵⁶⁾ So this animal was added in the final version of the work. This painting is thematically related to British works showing family scenes, often centred around the “angel in the house” – the heart of the house – the ideal woman, wife and mother. In works presenting this subject, the lady of the house's pet was often featured. It seems that the artist may have taken the figure of the animal from these works. The situation could have been similar in the portraits of high-ranking Indian ladies, whom he painted in large numbers. Some of them show added European elements, such as a column or curtains (typical motifs of the so-called Grand Portrait), as well as vases filled with flowers (characteristic for works presenting an ideal household) and European furniture. In these works dogs also appear at the legs of the people in the portraits (e.g. Princess Tarabai, 1881).⁵⁷⁾ Therefore, it can be assumed that they can be categorised as so-called Western elements aimed at the Europeanisation of a given image and the figure shown therein. They could also testify to a gradual change in customs and keeping pets at home in the British fashion.

⁵⁵⁾ 1893 r., Kowdiar Palace, Tiruwanantapuram, Chawla (2010: 23).

⁵⁶⁾ Neumayer, Schelberger (2005: 252–253).

⁵⁷⁾ Maharaja Fatesingh Museum, Vadodara, Chawla (2010: 87).

CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Since the early 20th century, keeping dogs in Indian homes has become more and more acceptable. The greatest reformers and thinkers of the early century, such as Swami Vivekananda and Rabanindranath Tagore, had their favourite pets. Currently, the dog population in India is difficult to estimate. However, their numbers are rising, especially when it comes to street dogs. Attention is drawn to the threats caused by the increasing number of wild herds. One problem is the spread of rabies. Published research indicates that “rabies is a serious problem in India, with an estimated 2 in 100,000 people being affected every year⁵⁸⁾. Since 1985, 25,000–30,000 deaths have been reported due to rabies in the country.”⁵⁹⁾ Another is the threat to wildlife.⁵⁹⁾ Paradoxically, people who keep dogs on their estates also contribute to this state of affairs. The problem is that male dogs are preferred, as they are popularly believed to cause fewer problems. This leads to female puppies being left to die. The few shelters that do take care of such animals (e.g. a shelter for homeless dogs in Goa, which is mainly occupied by bitches) are just a drop in the ocean of what is actually needed and do not solve this burning issue on Indian streets.

CONCLUSION

Dogs play a highly ambivalent role in Indian culture and society. On the one hand, this is the earliest domesticated animal, a friend and close helper of man since the dawn of time. On the other hand, they are perceived as liminal animals, existing on the border of two worlds. Their connection with cremation sites, which are highly contaminating, is emphasised. These are also areas where life and death come together. After death, the soul travels to the kingdom of Yama, accompanied by two dogs – children of the heavenly Sarama. These two main aspects of dogs – their close presence, which made it possible to observe their behaviour closely, and their occupation of the

⁵⁸⁾ Majumder, Chatterjee, Bhadra (2014: 874).

⁵⁹⁾ <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/wildlife-biodiversity/india-s-wildlife-is-under-threat-from-free-roaming-dogs-70648#:~:text=Free%20roaming%20dogs%20are%20threatening%20India's%20wildlife&text=They%20specifically%20caution%20that%20dogs,only%20breeding%20area%20in%20India.>

space betwixt our world and the spiritual world, made them a focal point when analysing signs of nature. When analysing the issue of dogs in India, it is clear that a low status was attributed to them by the brahminical tradition, while a high status predominated in other areas, such as tantrism. Dogs were also valued companions on the hunt, hence their tremendous importance at the courts of rulers who enjoyed this form of amusement. As colonisation became more entrenched, dogs were gradually better treated, even within high society. However, looking at the present times, many prejudices still surround these animals. Even people who keep dogs at home often feel free to get rid of female animals, consigning them to death or a very difficult life. Also, herds of homeless dogs, which are an increasing threat, are becoming more and more problematic and undoubtedly require a systemic solution (e.g. castration or the creation of shelters). The hope remains that this faithful friend of man, who has accompanied him since the dawn of time, will live harmoniously with him, treated with the care and respect he deserves.

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2. Bhairava, Popular print, 20th century.



3. Raja Ravi Varma, Dattatreya, circa 1910, Printed at Ravi Varma Press, Malavli near Lonavala, Maharashtra.



4. Hadkai Mata, Popular print, 20th century.



5. Khandoba and Mhalsa killing demons
Mani-Malla. Ravi Varma Press. Lithograph by
Chitrashala Press, circa 1880, Lithograph.



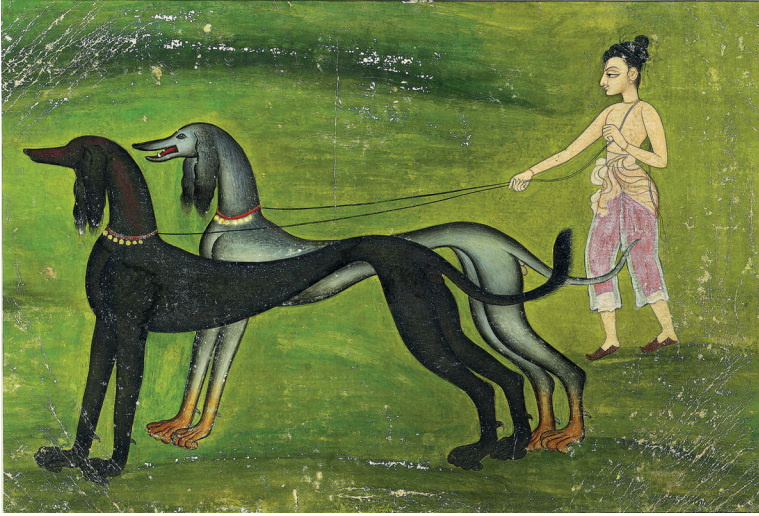
6. White Dog Barking at Buddha, Jamalgarhi,
Gandhara, 2nd century CE, Indian Museum,
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9. Two greyhounds and their trainer, Kishangarh, Rajasthan, late 18th century, private collection.



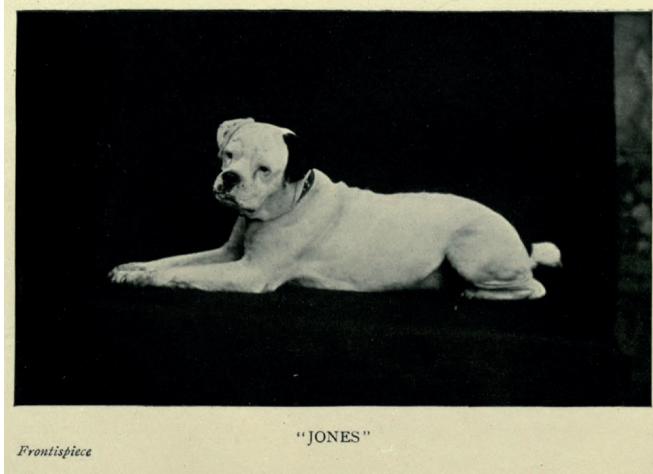
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11. Yogini in Meditation, Murshidabad, c. 1760, Private collection.



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14. A French officer handing his manservant his hat, Madras, ca. 1785, Victoria&Albert Museum, London, IS.75:11-1954.



Fig. 15. Two dogs in the compound of a Calcutta house, Calcutta, ca. 1845, Victoria&Albert Museum, London, IS.6-1957.



Fig. 16. A light brown saluki, By Gangaram, 1790. Inscribed above: Chuba a Dog belonging to CWM. Gangaram delint., British Library, Add.Or. 4146.



17. Raja Ravi Varma, There Comes Papa, 1893, Kowdiar Palace, Thiruvananthapuram.