The Magic of Gaṇapati
Introduction

The popular lore of Hinduism often rests on the esoteric lore of the tântrik tradition and takes on a different form as it passes through the centuries. Yet if the images, the yantras and the original tântrik 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 tântrik 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 liṅga 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 vermillion 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 Gaṁ ṭ I bow to Gaṇapati.

2. You clearly are the tattva. You alone are the creator. You alone are the maintainer. You alone are the destroyer. Of all this you certainly are Brahmā. You plainly are the essence.

3. Always I speak amṛta. 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!

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, aether. 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 mūlādhāra. You are the being of the three Śāktis. You

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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 Viśṇu, you are Rudra, you are Agni, you are Vayu, you are the sun, you are the moon, you are Brahmā, bhur-bhuvah-svar

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

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

9 Gañaka is the seer, nricad-gayatri the metre, Śrī Mahāgañapatī the devatā. Oṃ gañapataye 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 Gañapati, 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 text 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 mokṣa.

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.