Laksmi, the consort of Lord Jagannath is enshrined in a separate and independent temple in the north-west corner in the Jagannath temple precinct at Puri. In Orissa, Laksmi is worshipped as an independent deity, especially during the closing days of Dessehra (Asvina) month starting from Purnami day at Dhenkanal and Kendrapara, which is called the Gajalaksmi Puja. She is especially worshipped by the females of each and every household of Orissa on every Thursday of the month of Margasira which is known as Manabasa Gurubar. Gajalaksmi motif, Laksmi being bathed by two or four elephants, is carved in the centre of the architrave (Dvaralalatabimba) of the doorway of the sanctum sanctorum (Garbha griha) of almost all temples, whatever might be their cult affiliation. This type of depiction started mostly during the Somavamsi period, from the second half of the 9th century and onwards. Such bathing scene of the goddess by two elephants is described in the Visnudharmottara where it is mentioned that a pair of elephants should stand behind her head upturning the water of two jars. (Avarjitaghatam karyam tatprsthe kunjaradavayam). Further, this text mentions that the two elephants are the two nidlhi, Sankha and Padma (Hastidvayam vijanihi sankhapadmavibhau nidlhi).

In the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa, Gajalaksmi motif appeared for the first time in the royal seals attached to the ring of the copper-plate charters of the Somavamsi kings, who were ruling the 9th-10th century A.D. and the entire Orissa (Utkal, Kalinga and Kosala) in the 11th century A.D. But in the Somavamsi copper-plate charter seals Laksmi is depicted in the seated posture instead of in the standing posture as found in the Sarabhapuriya royal seals. Two repousse gold coins found in a village near Junagad town of Kalahandi district also bear the figure of Laksmi seated in Padmasana being flanked by two elephants in both sides. Both the elephants are standing in their hind legs like human beings and their trunks are raised. This type of depiction of elephants standing in their hind legs is found in the royal seals of the Sarabhapuriya copper-plate charters also. Both the coins seems to be imitation of the Sarabhapuriya repousse gold scholar J.N. Banerjea has identified the mutilated standing female figure found by Major General Alexander Cunningham amidst the ruins of Besnagar along with the Banyan capital as Srilaksmi and has proved her intimate association with the Pancaratra or the Bhagavata cult. He has quoted the relevant texts from the Markandeyapurana in support of his suggestion. The royal seal attached to the copper-plates of the Sarabhapuriyas bears the figure of two-handed goddess Laksmi standing in the Samabhanga posture, being flanked by two elephants pouring water in their raised trunks on her head. The left hand of the goddess of wealth is in Katyavalambita, while the right hand is raised up.

This aspect of Laksmi, popularly known as Gajalaksmi became a common motif in the royal seals attached to the rings of all the copper plate charters of the Somavamsi kings, who were ruling the upper Mahanadi valley in the 9th-10th century A.D. and the entire Orissa (Utkal, Kalinga and Kosala) in the 11th century A.D. But in the Somavamsi copper-plate charter seals Laksmi is depicted in the seated posture instead of in the standing posture as found in the Sarabhapuriya royal seals. Two repousse gold coins found in a village near Junagad town of Kalahandi district also bear the figure of Laksmi seated in Padmasana being flanked by two elephants in both sides. Both the elephants are standing in their hind legs like human beings and their trunks are raised. This type of depiction of elephants standing in their hind legs is found in the royal seals of the Sarabhapuriya copper-plate charters also. Both the coins seems to be imitation of the Sarabhapuriya repousse gold...
coins, and struck in the same fashion, and those
are believed to be Somavamsi gold coins by this
scholar.

The earliest of the Gajalaksmi motifs in the
upper Mahanadi valley is found amidst loose
sculptured panels of a temple ruins at Chandi
Mandir, Saintala in the Balangir district, where two-
handed Laksmi is seated in the Padmasana being
flanked by two elephants, one in each side, standing
in their hind legs and pouring water on the head of
the goddess in their raised trunks. This motif might
have adorned the central portion of the architrave
or the Dvaralalatavimba of the doorway to the
Garbhagriha of a temple of the Panduvamsi
period, i.e. 8th century A.D. To the proper right
portion of this figure there are two more depictions;
one is that of three Yaksa-type figures and the other
of a dancing Ganesa. The middle depiction might
be that of Kuvera and his two associates. All the
three depictions, Gajalaksmi, Kuvera and his two
associates and dancing Ganesa are separated by
pilaster designs. This seems to be a panel depicting
the Trinity of Fortune, i.e. Ganesa, Abhiseka Laksmi
and Kuvera. Another such panel is found in the
University Museum at Philadelphia, U.S.A.

Gajalaksmi as a motif in the centre of the
Dvaralalatavimba in the Siva temple at Deulgudi
in Balangir district seems to be interesting. In one
such depiction Laksmi devoid of any ornamentation
is seated in the Lalitasana. Two elephants are
depicted in the top-corners of the niche, above her
head. Both the elephants are carved in profile and
not in the conventional posture of flanking the
goddess in both sides. The connection of lotus
flower with Laksmi is focussed by a three-
dimensional full-blown lotus carved just below the
Laksmi figure in the edge of the architrave. It can
be dated to the beginning phase of the Somavamsi
period in the upper Mahanadi valley, i.e. the middle
of the 9th century A.D. (850 A.D). Such a plain
Gajalaksmi figure is found carved in a stone beam,
now kept in the Siva temple precinct at Jogisurda
in Balangir district, and another carved in the door-
lintel of the gateway to the Kosalesvara temple
complex at Vaidyanath in Sonepur district.

The ornamentations became more elaborate.
In a Gajalaksmi motif found carved on the centre
of the Dvaralalatavimba of the gateway to the
brick-built Jagamohana hall of the Kosalesvara
temple at Vaidyanath, two-handed Laksmi is seated
in Lalitasana on a Padmapitha. She is flanked
by two lady attendants in both sides. In the top-
portion, in both sides, two elephants with raised
trunks are pouring water on her. In the base
portions of the doorjamb, in both sides there are
two dvarapalas. Such two-handed Gajalakshmi
seated in Lalitasana, flanked by two lady attendants
in both sides and two elephants in the top-portion
is found in the Dvaralalatavimba of the eastern
and northern doorways to the Jagamohana of the
Narasinghnath temple at Paikmal also. But the
Gajalaksmi motif of Paikmal (Narasinghnath) is
very exquisitely carved, being bedecked by all
ornaments like Keyura, Kankana, Kaitimukha,
Kuchabandha, and anklets etc. The lower portion
of the pedestal has beautiful Jalapatra motif. The
elephants are carved on two lotus flowers. Both
the Gajalaksmi motifs of Vaidyanath and
Narasinghnath are encircled by beaded line designs
forming the rectangular niches in which they are.
Three bands of scroll works, Gelaba, Manusya
Kautaki and Jalapatra are carved in both sides
of the Gajalaksmi niche and also in the doorjams,
in the base of which Dvarapala flanked by the
river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna are carved on
their respective mounts, tortoise and crocodile. In
the eastern doorway at Narasinghnath, Navagraha
slab is fitted above the Dvaralalatavimba, which
convention was also popularised during the
Somavamsi period. Like the elaborately carved
doorkjams of Vaidyanath and Narasinghnath, the
dooryays of all three temples of the Ramesvara
group at Baudh are also noteworthy, where the
doorkjams have all the three bands of scroll works,
the Dvarapalas and Gajalaksmi motif as well as
the Navagraha slab above the doorway. But the
river goddesses are absent. In the case of the
dooryays to the inner sanctums of the Kosalesvara
temple at Daspur Surda in Balangir district and
the Vimalasvvara temple at Huma in Sambalpur
district, the doorjams are having the Gajalaksmi
motif, the three bands of scroll works and the
Dvarapalas. But the Navagraha slab is absent.
While Laksmi is seated in Padmasana at Daspur
Surda, she is depicted in Lalitasana sitting posture
at Huma. At Baudh, in the Ramesvara temple
complex another slab is lying loose, in which the
Navagraha panel has a Gajalaksmi motif attached to it just below in the central portion, where Laksmi is depicted in Padmasana. Such a Navagraha slab with a comparatively smaller Gajalaksmi motif depicting Laksmi in Padmasana is found at Pandhuakhol in Naktideul block area of Sambalpur district also. In these cases Laksmi is shown in a diminutive form being over-shadowed by the Navagraha. In one common long panel found fitted in the Dvaralatavimba of the brick-built Patalesvara temple at Budhikomna in Nuapara district also. Gajalaksmi is carved in one row along with the Navagrahas. It seems to be the precursor of all the Gajalaksmi panels having Navagraha above them.

Gajalaksmi motif continued to adorn the centre of the Dvaralatavimba of the doorways to the inner sanctums, mostly of Siva temples even upto the Chauhan period i.e. 15th-19th century A.D. In a later example found at Deheli in Baudh district, Laksmi seated in Lalitasana is depicted, but the grace is lost in the carving. Instead of three bands of scroll works there are two bands, the top-one with Jalapatra and the middle-one with big flower bud motifs, while the lower-one is absolutely plain. In the Garbhaghrha doorway of the Champesvara Siva temple at Champamal in Sonepur district, in both sides of the Gajalaksmi motif, the doorjambs and its base are having the carving of big floral decorations, with two lines of strings of buds in both sides.

The most elaborate of the Dvaralalatavimba (door-lintel) of the gateway to the Garbhaghrha is found in the Kaptlesvara temple at Charda in Sonepur district. The upper-most panel has the scene of Siva and Parvati playing chess, while the middle panel has the figure of Anantasayana Visnu, below which Gajalaksmi motif is depicted in a rectangular niche. Such Dvaralatavimba having Gajalaksmi motif and elaborate depiction of Nagas above it as well as Anantasayana Visnu in the upper panel(second one) is found fitted to the doorway of the Garbhaghrha of the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim in the Raipur district of Chhattisgarh State. The temple at Rajim is dated to the 8th century A.D. and belongs to the Nala rule, the elaborate depictions found on the Dvaralalatavimba of the temple at Charda might have been influenced by the Rajim style.

In most of the early temples of the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa; generally, the Dvaralatavimba of the doorways to the Garbhaghrha are adorned with Gajalaksmi motif in the centre. In some cases, either a panel of ordinary letter as at Baudh, Karadi, Vaidyanath (the small shrine, Suvesvara temple), Deulgudi, Kusang, Narsinghnath and Harishankar or a panel of the Anantasayi Visnu; as at Charda, Vaidyanath and Kusang are found carved above the Gajalaksmi motif. This decorative programme has some variations at Budhikomna, where the Gajalaksmi motif is amidst the Navagrahas in one panel. But on the door-lintel of the Garbhaghrha of the Khambeswari temple at Sonepur, a panel of ten lady figures is carved in one panel. In the first and tenth positions they are in standing posture with both hands folded in obeisance, whereas rest of the eight goddesses (including Gajalaksmi) are in the seated position. Gajalaksmi is in the center, flanked by three and four seated Devi figures, carved under Chhatra design and on their left thigh they hold one child each, seated on it. In this Gajalaksmi motif, Laksmi is seen to be seated in Lalitasana. Most probably, this is a unique Gajalaksmi panel and the only of its kind, depicting the Saptamatrikas, a cult popularized some-time around the 9th century A.D. This panel might have been fitted during the Chauhan period by collecting it from the ruins of an earlier temple. We find another unique Gajalaksmi panel, flanked by four elephants at Sonepur, at present fitted on the Dvaralalatavimba of the Garbhaghrha of the Ramesvara temple, situated on the confluence of the river Tel with the Mahanadi. In this panel, a four-handed figure of Laksmi seated in Padmasana is carved in the center, flanked by four elephants, two in each side, standing with pitchers on their trunks raised to pour water on her. In the extreme left and right sides of this panel, there are profiled figures of one female and one male devotee, both sitting in kneeled down position worshipping Laksmi with folded hands in obeisance. Such Gajalaksmi motif with four elephants is also found at Budhikomna. Besides these Gajalaksmi panels of the Khambesvari temple and the Ramesvara temples, other temples where Gajalaksmi motifs
occur on the Dvaralatatavimba of the Garbhagriha are the temples of Suvarnameru, Samalei, Gopinath and one sub-shrine behind the Jagannath temple as well as in a Devi temple near the Gopinath temple. In all these five cases, the Lakshmi figure is four-handed and seated in Padmasana. Her lower left hand is in Abhaya and the left one in Varada, while in her raised upper hands she is holding Padmanada. In the case of the Gajalaksmi panel of the sub shrine behind the Jagannath temple, both the elephants are seen to be standing on lotus in both sides of her with trunks raised above her head. The most astounding are two panels of the Anantasayi Visnu, one found on the door-lintel of the Jagamohana of the Rameswara temple and the other one in similar position in the Suvarnameru Siva temple. Learned scholar B.K. Rath has rightly taken both these panels to be of the Somavamsi period. Another learned scholar Henery Von Stietencron is of the view that the Anantasayi Visnu panel is a common feature found in the Visnu temples of the upper Mahanadi valley as found on the door-lintel of the Garbhagriha of the Laksmana temple at Sirpur (Raipur district of Chhattisgarh State) and on the massive western entrance of the Rajivalochana temple at Rajim (Raipur district). Both these temples are assigned to the Panduvamsi rule in Kosala and to circa 8th century A.D.

During the Chauhan period, although Gajalaksmi figures were carved on the Dvaralatatavimba, the sculptors have not followed the prescribed iconographic programme. In one such motif found at Pujari pali in Jharsuguda district, Lakshmi is depicted as four-handed, sitting in Padmasana. Instead of holding lotus flowers, she is holding the legs of two elephants in both her upraised hands, while the lower proper right and left hands are in Abhaya and Varada Mudras. She is wearing a long garland, which is hanging from her neck up to the pedestal, below which petalled flowers in semi-diamond circle are carved. Such floral designs in continuation are carved in both sides on the Dvaralatatavimba. The Gajalaksmi motif found in the Ramesvara temple at Sonepur is unique, where the four-handed Laksmi, seated in Padmasana is flanked by big elephants of the same size of the image of the goddess, although in other cases the elephants are depicted in a smaller size than that of the goddess.

Another peculiar Lakshmi figure is found carved on a stone-panel, now lying amidst loose sculptures at Sukhabandh near Hemgir town of Sundargarh district. This Dvaralatatavimba is 52" in length and 15" in breadth. It is an excellent piece of art, having an image of Laksmi in the centre. To the proper right of Laksmi image, there is a carving of two lions (lion and lioness). Similarly in the proper left portion, there is a carved motif depicting two swans. In the extreme left side of the panel is a dancing Yaksa, while in the extreme right is the figure of Ganesa seated in Maharajalila posture. This panel has foliage motifs and dotted line designs. Laksmi, Ganesa and the dancing Yaksa figures are carved in miniature temple niche designs. It is very peculiar that, the image of Laksmi is not that of Abhiseka Laksmi or Gajalaksmi as found in the central portion of the Dvaralatatavimba of the temples of the Somavamsi period, i.e. 9th-11th century A.D. Elephants with raised trunks are absent in this case. We find here a four-handed image of Laksmi, seated in Padmasana. It is an image of Saubhagy Laksmi, who is worshipped for happy and blissful conjugal life.

Very few single images of Gajalaksmi are found in the upper Mahanadi valley, numbering only four at Uraladani, Gandharadhi, Narasinghnath and Sonepur. Those were probably worshipped as independent images in separate temples dedicated to the Goddess. An image of Gajalaksmi of the size of around 15" in height and 6" in breadth is found in a mundi niche on the east of the Jagamohana of the Siddhesvara temple at Gandharadhi in Baudh district, where she is depicted in the seated posture of Padmasana, holding a long-stemmed lotus in each hand.

A beautiful Gaja-Laksmi image of the size of around 2’5” in height and 1’4” in breadth has been collected from Sankushgad and worshipped by one Shri Chakradhar Patra, an inhabitant of Uraladani village of M. Rampur Tehsil area of Kalahandi district. This image is chiselled on red stone. It is a four-handed image in which goddess Laksmi is seated in Lalitasana. In both her upper hands she is holding long-stemmed full-blown lotus, while her lower left and right hands are in Abhaya and Varada mudras. Two profiled figures of
elephants are in both top-corners of the slab with their trunks raised, pouring water on her head. The peculiarity of this image is that there is a ram carved as her *vahana* in the pedestal portion.

Although Gajalaksmi motif is usually carved in the centre of the *Dvaralalatavimba* of the *Garbhagrha* or *Jagamohana* doorways, a slight deviation is found at Narsinghnath, where we find a four-handed Laksmi figure fitted to a niche in the northern side, just below the Raha portion, in between an Angasikhara motif and the Baranda. This image is made of polished red stone, depicting the goddess seated in the *Padmasana* posture on a lotus pedestal. She is holding a *Sankha* in her upper right hand and keeping both her lower hands on the thighs. Her upper left hand is broken. She is flanked by two elephants with raised trunks over her head.

Besides the Gajalaksmi motifs and independent figures, two images of Laksmi-Narayana in the same style of Uma-Mahesvara are found at Belkhandi in Kalahandi district and Narsinghnath in Bargah district. The Laksmi Narayana image found at Belkhandi, from the stylistic ground can be dated to the second half of the 8th century A.D. The other Laksmi-Narayan image found at Narsinghnath can be dated to around 12th-13th century A.D. The Laksmi-Narayana image of Belkhandi has been taken as the earliest of its kind by learned scholar J.P. Singh Deo.

The Laksmi-Narayana image of Narsinghnath is fitted in a niche to the left side of the eastern doorway of the *Jagamohana* of Narsinghnath Temple. Lord Narayana is sitting in *Lalitasana* with his consort Laksmi on his left thigh. The left leg of Laksmi and the right leg of Narayana are hanging below. The lower left hand of the Lord is around the back of Laksmi drawing her closer to his body. His arm has come out from under the left armpit of Laksmi and touching her left breast. Laksmi is holding a lotus flower in her left hand and looking at the Lord with a bewitching smile. The Lord is holding a *Cakra* and a *Gada* in his upper right and left hands respectively, while in his lower right hand is a *Sankha*. The divine couple are heavily bedecked with ornaments. This seems to be a sculptural representation of the 12th-13th century A.D. The facial charm of the Somavamsi period is not found in the faces of the divine couple, instead there is a tight-lipped frowning gesture.

The worship of the divine couple, Laksmi and Narayan seems to be popular from the 8th century onwards in the upper Mahanadi valley, as in the invocatory verses of the Kumurakela plates of the Bhanja king Satrubhanja of Khinjali Mandala, the divine couple Laksmi and Narayana has been worshiped at the beginning : *'Anabarata Bahala Pulaka Laksmikuchapidanena Duritambah / Apaharata Surabhi Parimalasusatapadamura sthalam Visnuh //* (Tr. Prof. Rajkishore Mishra - Laksmi in constant caress of Lord Visnu appears to be trans and drops of sweat coming out of her breast with all its ardour, wipe out sins and cleanse the Universe).

From all the above archaeological evidences it is clear that right from the period of the Sarabhapuriyas, i.e. 5th-6th century A.D. the worship of goddess Laksmi was given much emphasis and therefore she has been depicted in the Sarabhapuriya royal seals (of the copper plate charters), gold coins of the Somavamsis and Kalacuris, *Dvaralalatavimba* of most of the Siva, Sakti and other temples, built during the Panduvamsi, Bhanja, Somavamsi, Ganga and Telugu Choda periods. There are ample evidences of her worship as an independent deity and also alongwith her consort Lord Narayana (Visnu) in the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa.

**References :**

1. Vismudharomottara, III, 82, 10.

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