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## THE PLACE OF A LIZARD IN INDIAN SCRIPTURES, SCULPTURES, BELIEF SYSTEMS

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A study concerning a lizard's symbolism is well-known in the scholarly world. Nevertheless, it has not attracted the required attention of many academicians. In the light of Indian ethos, we have incredibly diverse belief systems for a lizard; somewhere, it is deified as the goddess Lakṣmī, but it is also considered a bad omen. A total of 88 names have been found for a lizard in Sanskrit. Some of the names are very typical and oft used, like *godhā*, *pallī*, *saraṭa*, and *kṛkavāku*, a variety of atypical names, like *ṭaṭṭanī*, *dārumatsyāhvayā*, *brāhmaṇī*, *lalantikā*, etc. are also found in the language. After collecting the lexical data for a lizard, we vividly find exciting occurrences in the Sanskrit literature. A lizard has been mentioned symbolically in texts from the Vedas to Tantra and classical Sanskrit literature to scientific treatises. Studying these texts, temple art, and belief systems in the light of a lizard is much required to uncoil the symbolism. Thus, this paper aims to comprehend and uncoil the symbolism of a lizard in Indian ethos based on literary and supportive temple art-related sources. This paper will give attempt to address the following problems: 1) Listing of Sanskrit names for a lizard and a general study of its auspicious and inauspicious shades; 2) Collection, interpretation, and study of the literary references (limited to Sanskrit texts only) related to a lizard (This literature will be divided into the following categories: “The beliefs like gaining merits and sins”; “Mythology”; “Vedic literature & Tantra”; “Miscellaneous”); 3) Study concerning the tangible heritage like temple art: an icon at the Hoyasaleshwara temple (Halebidu, Karnataka, India), goddess Jogaṅbā (Alampur, Andhra Pradesh, India), Virupaksha temple (Hampi, Karnataka, India), etc.; 4) Study of a few peculiar local belief systems in India.

**Keywords:** Lizard, *pallī*, *godhā*, symbolism, Indian culture, Sanskrit texts, sculpture

### Introduction

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes a lizard as “any of a suborder (Lacertilia) of reptiles distinguished from the snakes by a fused inseparable lower jaw, a single temporal opening, two pairs of well-differentiated functional limbs which may be lacking in burrowing forms, external ears, and eyes with movable lids”. In the light of the Indian scenario, we have incredibly diverse belief systems for a lizard; somewhere, it is deified as the goddess Lakṣmī (a Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity), but somewhere it is considered a bad omen. It may be noted at the very beginning that we will deal with lizard, iguana, and chameleon simultaneously, as their terms and references overlap. Thus, we will retain the name lizard hereafter since the main focus is on the said creature, but we will deal with the other two creatures whenever required, as these three belong to a typical family. One may find more than ninety names for a lizard in Sanskrit. Some names are very typical and oft used, like *godhā*, *pallī*, etc., and a variety of atypical names like *ṭaṭṭanī*, *dārumatsyāhvayā*, *brāhmaṇī*, *lalantikā*, etc. are also found in the language. After

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collecting the lexical data for a lizard, we can deal with several references attached to these words. One may find such references in Vedas, Tantra literature, classical literature, and scientific treatises. It can, undoubtedly, be asserted that these references, in abundance, give an impetus to many questions and inquiries. Apart from this data, the archaeological references of a lizard in Indian temples (e.g., a lizard climbing on a *śivaliṅga* at the Virūpakṣa temple, Hampi, Karnataka, India, etc.) make a significant addition to our data and doubts. Understanding the exact place of a lizard in the Indian ethos and its emblematic importance are thought-provoking topics. We will not just be dealing with the literary or lexical taxonomy of lizards, but also ethnographical, ritualistic, medicinal, and folk taxonomies will be dealt with in this paper. It is also essential to know whether the taxonomical treatment given to lizards is complementary to or overlapping with its symbolic comprehension. A few questions will be discussed in this paper to pave a journey for this fascinating and slightly rare topic.

### Literature review

Forth discusses the Nage of Eastern Indonesia and sums up how animal classifications in a given society need not compose a conceptual unity in light of the symbolic lizard [Forth 2013]. Douglas elaborates on the symbolic properties of some specific animals with particular reference to lizards [Douglas 1984]. In her other work (2010), she highlights the lizard symbolism in the Lele religious system [Douglas 2010]. Butrat notes that the lizard is not an ordinary reptile but an animal representing the ancestral spirit of the Kui people of Ban Thum village in Thailand [Butrat 2018]. Bhattacharya, taking account of traditional and cultural beliefs in India related to a lizard, focuses on the conservational part of the species [Bhattacharya 2016]. Along the same line, Ceriaco et al. focus on the conservational part based on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge and symbolic ideas of geckos in southern Portugal [Ceriaco et al. 2011]. However, the latter two works deal with conservational research, but the authors are equally considering the base of symbolic and cultural significance. A study of the symbolic representations of lizards in the Indian scenario is wholly ignored. Likewise, Dhare, while discussing the iconography of Jogulambā (a goddess in Andhra Pradesh, India), clearly ignores the presence of a lizard on the headgear of the goddess [Dhare 2011]. Redij and Jogalekar (2010) and Redij (2012) have attempted to understand the inauspicious features of a lizard in light of the epithets like *jyeṣṭhā* [Redij, Jogalekar 2010; Redij 2012]. However, a study concerning lizards appears as an *en passant* because the central theme of the papers is Alakṣmī.

### Names for a lizard in Sanskrit

First, let us look at the names of a lizard in Sanskrit. The below-given names are only for reference; we will not deal with all of them in the paper<sup>1</sup>.

Sl. No.	Name	Meaning in English
1.	<i>āgāragodhikā</i>	One which stays in a house
2.	<i>aṇḍaja</i>	One which is born from an egg
3.	<i>añjana</i>	As black as lampblack
4.	<i>añjanādhikā</i>	Darker than lampblack
5.	<i>bahumūtraka</i>	Micturates phenomenally
6.	<i>bhittikā</i>	Pierces a wall or stays on a wall
7.	<i>bimba</i>	Stays as still as a mirror image
8.	<i>brāhmaṇī</i>	Female priest
9.	<i>citrakola</i>	One which has an unusual dotted tale
10.	<i>cucchu</i>	One which produces <i>chu-chu</i> sound
11.	<i>daivajñā</i>	Fortuner

Sl. No.	Name	Meaning in English
12.	<i>dārumatsyāhvayā</i>	Gets attracted toward a specific plant called <i>dārumatsya</i>
13.	<i>dārumukhyāhvayā</i>	Gets attracted toward a specific plant called <i>dārumukhya</i>
14.	<i>durāroha</i>	One which mounts (on a person) with significant pain (signifying a bad omen)
15.	<i>dhundhumāra</i>	NA <sup>2</sup>
16.	<i>dīrghapucchikā</i>	Having a long tale
17.	<i>drumāśraya</i>	Staying on a tree
18.	<i>godhā</i>	One which embraces – monitor lizard or iguana
19.	<i>godhikātmaja</i>	Son of <i>godhikā</i>
20.	<i>grāhiṇī</i>	One which consumes a prey
21.	<i>grhagodhā</i>	Household lizard (cf. <i>godhā</i> )
22.	<i>grhagodhikā</i>	Household lizard (cf. <i>godhā</i> )
23.	<i>grhagolikā</i>	Household lizard (cf. <i>godhā</i> )
24.	<i>grhālikā</i>	Household lizard which hisses like a scorpion
25.	<i>hālāhala</i>	Poisonous
26.	<i>hālinī</i>	Giant house lizard
27.	<i>hemala</i>	One which has a golden patch or golden hue
28.	<i>jāhaka</i>	NA
29.	<i>jyeṣṭhā</i>	Inauspicious lizard
30.	<i>kakkinda</i>	One which creates sound
31.	<i>kaṇṭakāgāra</i>	One which eats thorns/one which stays in a nest made of thorns
32.	<i>kaṭakagrha</i>	One which stays in a nest made of thorns
33.	<i>kīlālin</i>	NA
34.	<i>koka</i>	One which takes (the prey?)
35.	<i>koṣṭhāgārī</i>	One which stays in a room
36.	<i>koṣṭhagrharīkā</i>	Household lizard
37.	<i>krakacapad(pād)</i>	One which has feet like the leaves of a screw pine tree
38.	<i>kṛkalāsa</i>	One which creates <i>kṛk-kṛk</i> sound through the throat
39.	<i>kṛkavāku</i>	One which creates <i>kṛk-kṛk</i> sound through the throat
40.	<i>kuḍyamatsya</i>	Like a fish on a wall
41.	<i>kuḍyapucchā</i>	Tale of a wall
42.	<i>kukkuṭa</i>	One which creates <i>kuk-kuk</i> sound
43.	<i>kulāhaka</i>	One which destroys a clan
44.	<i>kuṇḍṛṇācī</i>	NA
45.	<i>laktikā</i>	Red colored lizard
46.	<i>lalantikā</i>	One which rolls down like a necklace around a neck
47.	<i>lattikā</i>	NA
48.	<i>mahāśiras</i>	Having a large head
49.	<i>maṇḍalin</i>	One which encircles
50.	<i>māṇīkyā</i>	Having hue like a ruby gem
51.	<i>mayūrārin</i>	Enemy of a peacock
52.	<i>mūlin</i>	One which puts its claws firmly
53.	<i>musalī</i>	As big as a mace/club
54.	<i>musalikā</i>	As big as a mace/club
55.	<i>pallī</i>	One which goes

Sl. No.	Name	Meaning in English
56.	<i>pehuvāsa</i>	One which stays (or is born from) in an egg
57.	<i>piṅgala</i>	Auburn
58.	<i>pratisūrya</i>	One which bears multi-colors like the sun
59.	<i>pratisūryakaḥ</i>	One which bears multi-colors like the sun
60.	<i>pratisūryaśayānaka</i>	One which bears multi-colors like the sun and lies down
61.	<i>raktapucchikā</i>	Having a red tale
62.	<i>ralā</i>	NA
63.	<i>śakunajñā</i>	Fortuner
64.	<i>sāñjanaḥ</i>	As black as lampblack
65.	<i>śaraṇḍa</i>	NA
66.	<i>saraṭa</i>	One which goes
67.	<i>sāśayandaka</i>	NA
68.	<i>śaya</i>	One which lies down
69.	<i>śayāna</i>	One which lies down
70.	<i>śayānaka</i>	One which lies down
71.	<i>śayaṇḍaka</i>	One which sleeps in an egg
72.	<i>śivā</i>	Auspicious
73.	<i>śṛdāku</i>	One which goes
74.	<i>suduṣprabha</i>	Inauspicious
75.	<i>supadī</i>	Auspicious
76.	<i>surājikā</i>	Good ruler
77.	<i>suraśvetā</i>	White auspicious lizard
78.	<i>śuskāṅgī</i>	Dry
79.	<i>śyāmā</i>	Black
80.	<i>ṭaṭṭanī</i>	One which creates a sound like ‘ <i>ṭaṭṭ ṭaṭṭ</i> ’
81.	<i>trivarnaḥkṛt</i>	Having three hues
82.	<i>trṇagodhā</i>	Stays in grass
83.	<i>vedāra</i>	One which goes and creates space (literally a hole)
84.	<i>vidāruḥ</i>	One which goes and creates space (literally a hole)
85.	<i>virūpin</i>	Having different forms (hues)
86.	<i>viśamvarā</i>	Poisonous
87.	<i>vṛkṣaśa</i>	One which sleeps on a tree
88.	<i>vṛttistha</i>	One which does not move <sup>3</sup>

Figure 1  
List of names for a lizard in Sanskrit

An inclusive list of all variants goes beyond 100 names! The word-patterns and shades of these words are pretty over-lapping; see *śaya-śayāna*, *añjana-sañjana*.

On the same line and as stated before, it is pretty challenging to chalk out a distinguishing line between a lizard, a chameleon, and an iguana in Sanskrit. The word *kṛkavāku* is used for several creatures of and except the lizard family<sup>4</sup>, a lizard<sup>5</sup>, a chameleon<sup>6</sup>. The Prasāda-ṭīkā on Prakriyākaumudī (2.609.8) states *Kṛkaṁ vakti kṛkavākuḥ kukkuṭaḥ kṛkalāśaś ca*. (the one which produced the sound *kṛk-kṛk*). The word *godhā*, too, has been used for an iguana and a monitor lizard<sup>7</sup>.

In order to comprehend the symbolic significance of a lizard, let us deal with some representative references for a lizard from the Sanskrit texts.

***Some select references to establish the range  
of areas where a lizard is being referred***

**A) The beliefs like gaining merits and sins.**

The beliefs like gaining merits and sins, this area can be considered the most prominent one with respect to the symbolism of a lizard. This will be observed in the paper, time and again, in the connection of a lizard with several phenomenological connections. It is highly essential to the contextualization of such occurrences. We shall quickly consider the reference before dwelling on the original references. Concerning the mythology, a hater of Viṣṇu and Śiva shall become a chameleon and mouse, respectively. In India, the philosophical and sectarian opposition between Śaivites (worshippers of Śiva) and Vaiṣṇavites (worshippers of Viṣṇu) is quite common. Several attempts were contributed to bring peace between these two sects (for instance: the evolution of Hari-Hara, literally a union of Śiva and Viṣṇu). A lizard's employment for this sectarian synthesis shows the influence of lizard-related symbolism in the country. Another story is quoted for the Prabhāsakhaṇḍa located in today's Gujarat (a state in India). The place is described as "Nṛgatīrtha", where the king Nṛga was cursed and converted into the form of a lizard for not giving an appropriate donation and then released by Kṛṣṇa. The Skanda-Purāṇa describes some births of a demon, and one is mentioned as a lizard. The same Purāṇa affirms the importance of donating water at the holy place Venkatadri, located in Andhra Pradesh, India, to get rid of the birth of a lizard. These two denote another dimension of the beliefs related to a lizard. This affirmatively suggests an odious state of a lizard in people's minds, perhaps due to its zoological activities and nature. Some beliefs are also associated with the Dos and Don'ts. For instance, the one who desires his preceptor's wife or commits a heinous sin becomes a lizard permanently. Such types of moral stories are preached through a lizard that demonstrates a significant role played by the creature in society. In the Indian ethos, sometimes, seeing or even listening to the sound of a lizard and a chameleon is not at all auspicious because a mongoose and a lizard are considered bad omens. These two creatures have been compared with other bad omens like a skull, naked person, etc. Let us see some references from the scriptures. All these references often highlight the popularity and spread of lizard-related symbolism. Their descriptions or translations are provided in the footnotes thereon:

- *Viṣṇudrohī ca saraṭhaḥ syāt śivadrohī ca mūṣakaḥ*<sup>8</sup> (Skandapurāṇa 1.3.5.23);
- *Gurudārābhilāṣī ca kṛkalāso bhavet ciraṃ*<sup>9</sup> (Skandapurāṇa 81.5.59.21);
- *Mahāpātakināḥ hi kṛkalāsā hi jāyante*<sup>10</sup> (Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa 2.120.5);
- *Na saraṭo drṣṭaḥ śivāya kvacit*<sup>11</sup> (Yogayātrā 14.4);
- *Kṛkalāso hi pāpāptmā*<sup>12</sup> (Śaṅkarācārya on Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad 188.17);
- *Kṛkalāsamiti khyātaṃ nṛgatīrtham anuttamam*<sup>13</sup> (Skandapurāṇa. 7.4.10.1)<sup>14</sup>;
- *Dadṛṣuste mahākāyaṃ kṛkalāsamavasthitam*<sup>15</sup> (Anuśāsanaparvan 69.4);
- *Bahuvārṣasahasrāṇi bahuvārṣasātāni ca. śvabhre 'smin kṛkalāso vai dīrghakālam vasiṣyasi*<sup>16</sup>. (Rāmāyaṇa 7.53.19);
- *Darśanam vā rutam vā 'pi na godhākṛkalāsayoḥ*<sup>17</sup> (Suśruta-Saṃhitā sūtrasthāna 129.37);
- *Nakulaś cāsau ca saraṭaḥ pāpado gataḥ*<sup>18</sup> (Bṛhatsaṃhitā. 86.41);
- *...prayāte tu kṛkalāso na vīkṣitaḥ*<sup>19</sup> (Nāradasaṃhitā 33.82);
- *kṛkalāsoragagodhākapālanagnādi darśanam neṣṭam*<sup>20</sup> (Hīrāsāra 32.4);
- *Daśajanmāni kṛkalāso bhaviṣyati*<sup>21</sup> (Skanda-Purāṇa 31.52.890);
- *Trīṇye' jagaro ghorāś caturthe 'ham bhavet vṛkaḥ. pañcame vidvarāhaś ca ṣaṣṭhe 'ham kṛkalāsakaḥ*<sup>22</sup> (Skanda-Purāṇa 3.3.15.40);
- *Lobhātpāpāni kurvāṇaḥ kāmād vā yo na budhyate. bhraṣṭaḥ paśyati tasyāntam brāhmaṇī karakād iva*<sup>23</sup> (Rāmāyaṇa 3.29.5);
- *Hemāṅgasya jaladānākaraṇena grhagodhikātvaprāptiḥ*<sup>24</sup> (Skanda-Purāṇa 2.7.6.19).

### B) Mythology.

The mythological references, aside from the beliefs like gaining merits and sins, highlight other aspects of a lizard. These mentions highlight a lizard's slightly elevated status when it comes to contact with a divine being. A *Godhā* (iguana) participated in a *devāsura-yuddha* (a war between gods and demons). It was also on the emblem of Uma (goddess) and so on her flag. One of the oft-found positive relations is between Kubera (a god of wealth) and a lizard. On the other hand, there are negative connotations, as mentioned in the following references. It can be concluded that, again, a varied range of beliefs is also available in this respect:

- *Śivābhir ākhubhiḥ kecit kṛkalāsaiḥ śasair naraiḥ. bastair eke kṛṣṇasārair haṁsair anye ca sūkaraiḥ* (Bhāgavatapurāṇa 8.10.11)<sup>25</sup>;
- *Tasmād yajñāt kṛkalāsasya rūpeṇa dhanādhyakṣaḥ avyapākramat*<sup>26</sup> (Viṣṇudharmot-tarapurāṇa 1.24.10);
- *Kṛkalāso dhanādhyakṣaḥ* (Rāmāyaṇa 7.18.5)<sup>27</sup>;
- *Daśa vai sapta cānyāni kṛkalāso bhavet samāḥ* (Varāhapurāṇa 132.28)<sup>28</sup>;
- *Godhā cāpi umādevyā raivatasya hayaḥ smṛtaḥ*<sup>29</sup> (Bhaviṣyapurāṇa 1.138.39);
- *Vyomāsurasya bhaginī godheva karkaśā*<sup>30</sup> (Gaṇeśa-Purāṇa 87.4).

### C) Vedic literature & Tantra<sup>31</sup>.

The Vedic literature helps us get the ritualistic belief-system-based references to a smaller extent. However, we cannot ignore the corpus since it provides a substantial base of semantic shades of certain words. As per the available references, the belief regarding the sanctity of the creature can be observed right from the Vedic period. We can also observe some semantic overlapping of the word *kṛkavāku*. If one attempts to see the semantic shades beyond the usual interpretations, one can observe the innate relationship between a chameleon and the sun. The sun has seven colors, and so does the said creature. This is a magnificent example that is seen in the Vedic corpus. Apāla's story establishes the lizard's connection with malevolent things like skin diseases or similar repugnant things. It can be summarized that right from the Vedic period, the two streams – benevolent and malevolent – for lizard-related interpretations were in vogue. These malevolent interpretations can also be seen in the references cited from the Tantric scriptures:

- *Kṛkalāsaḥ śakuniḥ pippakā te śaravyāyai*<sup>32</sup> (Taittirīyasaṁhitā 5.5.19.1);
- *Prāṇam na vicchindyāt api kṛkalāsasya*<sup>33</sup> (Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 14.4.3.22);
- *Lohitaśirasam kṛkalāsam hatvā*<sup>34</sup> (Kauśikasūtra XLVIII.39);
- *Kṛkavākuḥ sāvitraḥ*<sup>35</sup> (Maitrāyaṇīsam. 3.14.15; Kāṭhakaśaṁhitā 5.78);
- *Yām te cakruḥ kṛkavākāvaje vā yām kurīrīni...* (Atharvaveda 5.31.1)<sup>36</sup>;
- *Tām khe' anaso' ty abrahat sā kṛkalāsy abhavat*<sup>37</sup> (*apālā-kathā*) (Jaiminīya-brāhmaṇa 1.221);
- *Yan mukhodgīrṇam tāmbūlam kṛkalāsasya carmaṇi bhavet*<sup>38</sup> (Īśānaśivagurudeva-paddhati 1.51.3);
- *Raktena kṛkalāsasya siktasūtrasya laṅghanāt*<sup>39</sup> (Ibid 1.51.5);
- *Raktena kṛkalāsasya sarpasya haritasya vā. rañjite laṅghite sūtre yoṣidraktaṁ sra-vaty alam. Ullaṅghane punaḥ svastho jāyate varayoṣitaḥ*<sup>40</sup> (Siddhanāgārjutantra 26.22);
- *Idānīm svarūpaparivartinyaḥ samayadevatya ucyante ... kākāsyā godhī. ulūkāsyā mūṣakī ... yamamathanī kṛkalāsī*<sup>41</sup> (Laghutantraṭīkā 5.25).

### D) Miscellaneous.

Although these references do not help us directly, it is interesting to note them for seeing a wide range of lizard-related interpretations and usages:

- *Godakagrāme saraṭako nāma bharaṭakācāryaḥ*<sup>42</sup> (Bharaṭakadvātrimśikā 7);
- *Saraṭam vārayed ... hayālaye* | (Śārngadharapaddhati 16739)<sup>43</sup>;
- *Kṛkalāsabhujāṅgākṛtābharaṇāḥ* | (Yogayātrā 6.24)<sup>44</sup>;
- *Lambanam syāl lalantikā*<sup>45</sup> (Agnipurāṇa 363.27).

Amidst all these references, it becomes incredibly challenging to decide the place of a lizard in Indian culture. These particular references are sufficient to illuminate the emblematic status of a lizard in Indian culture. There are a few more observations before dwelling into the further discussion.

The words like *godhā* and *ṛkavāka* have manifold meanings like a lizard, monitor lizard, alligator, and iguana. According to the Atharvaveda 5.31.1<sup>46</sup>, one may arrive at the meaning of “*ṛkavāka*” as “a rooster”. The commentary Prakāśa on Prakriyākaumudī (2.609.8) comments *ṛkaṁ vaktīti ṛkavākuḥ*<sup>47</sup>. Hence, the word can be used for both a rooster and a lizard. The word *kukkuṭa* is used as a lizard, chameleon, and rooster<sup>48</sup> in the Sanskrit Lexicons. The exciting part is that both are connected to the sun. A rooster is connected with the sun because of his early-morning duties, and a chameleon is associated with the sun god as *pratisūryaka* because of its physical quality of changing body colors (the sun or sun rays too have multiple colors). A rooster and the sun [cf. Dange 1974] are connected with fertility mythology (a rooster is seen on the flag of Murugan (Kārtikeya), an important fertility deity in the southern part of India [cf. Dhare 2011, 180–190]). However, a lizard’s connection is hardly found with any fertility emblems. On the contrary, it is oft-connected with *punya-pāpa* beliefs, as cited in the unique references. However, if the range and proportion of the auspicious and inauspicious features of a lizard are mapped on a graph, it would provide us with the following output:

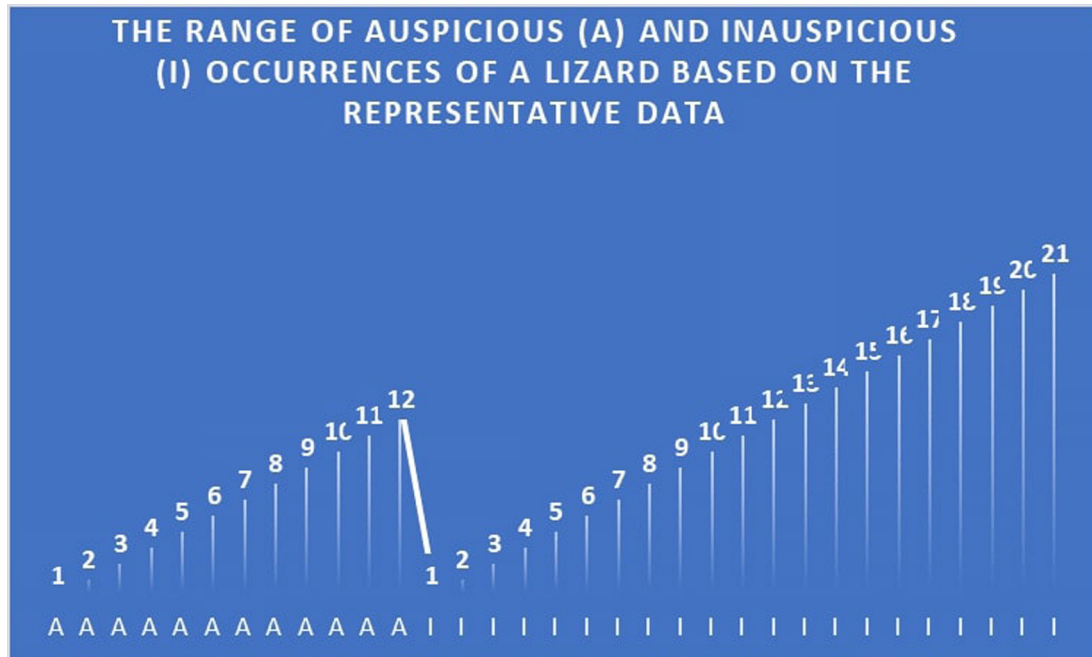


Figure 2  
The range of auspicious and inauspicious occurrences of a lizard based on the representative data

The author would like to note that the creature, which is very harmless and extremely useful for the ecosystem and hygiene of society (as it preys on insects), is faint-hearted, cuts its tail out of fear, and is looked down on by society most of the time. The varieties of lizards attract zoologists and environmentalists because a lizard is a vital part of the ecosystem. The attitude to frown upon a lizard always puzzles the author and motivates him to understand the sociological and traditional mindsets of people who look at it. In some places of India, like Tamil Nadu (a southern state of India), the presence of a lizard nearby one’s worship place is considered as much sacred. On the other hand, if we consider the Marathi language majorly spoken in the Maharashtra state of India, the *ḍā* suffix

(which is used to show the inferiority of somebody like *tusaḍa* [a curt], *bevaḍā* [a drunkard], *baḍabaḍā* [an excessively talkative], *jaḷakukaḍā* [the one who feels jealousy], *theraḍā-mhātāraḍā* [an old codger], *bobaḍā* [an inarticulate], etc.) is used for a chameleon – *sara-ḍā*! A lizard is considered a “*brāhmaṇī*”<sup>49</sup> in Sanskrit, and it has been told earlier that a chameleon is associated with Kubera<sup>50</sup>. On the other hand, the Sanskrit word *jyeṣṭhā* is translated as “inauspicious lizard”. It can be explained that the original meaning of this word is “the elder”, and the meaning of “bad luck” came from Indian mythology, where the goddess Alakṣmī (“failure”) is considered the elder sister of Lakṣmī (goddess of prosperity). Still, the detestation for it needs to be traced culturally, and the above sources help us comprehend the scripture-based cultural upbringing of the notions.

### **Iconographical study and belief systems**

Let us look at some archaeological (specifically, temple architecture) details:

1. The iconography of Gaurī<sup>51</sup> and Śriyā depicts them riding on an iguana<sup>52</sup>. This form symbolizes adamant Gaurī and her persistence to attain Śiva. The way an iguana holds its claws firmly on a surface, the same way Gaurī had the firm and austere decisiveness for attaining Śiva as the husband. This shows a lizard’s symbolism to show the austerity and decisiveness and its depiction through a sculpture on one of southern India’s most famous architectural marvels. Given image 1 is a depiction of an animal from the lizard’s family<sup>53</sup>.



Figure 3

Śiva-Pārvatī and the latter riding on an iguana, Halebidu, Hoysaleswara temple<sup>54</sup>

2. Several *śivaliṅga*-s carved on different temple pillars at Hampi, Karnataka, India, have a lizard climbing on them. These numerous sculptures have been puzzling many scholars. The said reminds us of an idiom from the Marathi language *pimḍīvaracā vimcū* – a scorpion settled on a *śivaliṅga*. This idiom is used for such a person who is undefeatable or has kept himself away from all dangers or the one who should be protected. Perhaps, these sculptures must convey the thought of not killing the lizards. One more interpretation can be drawn from such carvings – a lizard can keep its body stuck or constant on an object; similarly, lizards climbing on a *śivaliṅga* symbolize and assert the importance of dedication to Śiva.





Figure 4  
Śivaliṅga at Hampi. Photo by M. Walvekar



Figure 5  
Śivaliṅga at Hampi. Photo by M. Walvekar



Figure 6  
Śivaliṅga at Hampi. Photo by M. Walvekar

3. Kanchi (Tamil Nadu) houses an atypical lizard temple. The temple is known as Kanchi Varadaraja Perumal Temple. The firm belief in the devotees appeals to touch the “Golden Lizard” to eliminate your sins. It is a practice in the temple that one should touch the golden lizard to wash off the sins committed in life. This rightly conveys the auspicious interpretation and symbolism associated with a lizard.



Figure 7

Golden lizard temple, Varadaraj Perumal temple, Kanchi<sup>55</sup>

4. One of the *śaktipīṭha*-s situated in Andhra Pradesh – Joguḷāmbā is another riddle for the lizard-related studies. The goddess has an aggressive form and possesses fangs. The rear portion of the goddess’s headgear is made up of a skull, and the front has a lizard and a scorpion on it. It is strongly believed by the devotees that if one does not worship the deity appropriately, then initially, there will be plenty of lizards in his/her house<sup>56</sup>. If it continues, the goddess will send a pile of scorpions to the house, and in the end, one’s continued ignorance will lead to the heap of a skull in his/her house (literally, massive death). Dhere proves this deity as a “fertility” goddess, but he has ignored the significance of a lizard [Dhere 2011, 50–72]. Nevertheless, this temple categorically requires particular attention in light of the lizard and scorpion carvings.



Figure 8

Joguḷāmbā, Andhra Pradesh<sup>57</sup>

5. There is an interesting regional belief<sup>58</sup> about Mumbādevī's (the goddess of Mumbai, Maharashtra, India) curse on the lizards. A lizard creates a specific sound that is not auspicious enough in some instances. It is firmly believed that it brings some bad news. When Mumbai became a hub of employment in British India, several people migrated from their native places to Mumbai in search of bread and butter. The goddess of Mumbai cursed the lizards not to produce the inauspicious sound that makes a person smell a rat. Furthermore, in those days, quick modes of communication were rare. Hence, Mumbādevī became kind enough to protect the city's residents from these bad omens.

### ***General analysis and outcomes of the study***

A vast range of the names for a lizard highlights the large-scale popularity of lizard-related symbolism in both the senses – auspicious and inauspicious. We can assert with the help of figure 3 that the occurrences associated with the inauspicious references are more than the auspicious ones. This categorically submits a deplorable state of a lizard in people's minds than the elevated one. However, the Vedic literature offers a smaller help for the study concerning a lizard. Nevertheless, the notion of semantic overlapping becomes easier to comprehend in light of the said set of literature. The two streams – benevolent and malevolent – for lizard-related interpretations were in vogue from the Vedic period. The Tantric scriptures resemble the Purāṇic concepts (as shown in the paper) of elevating a lizard's symbolic status when associated with a divine entity. Vajrayoginī in Buddhism is one such example. Aside from the beliefs like gaining merits and sins, the mythological references highlight other aspects of a lizard. These mentions highlight a lizard's slightly elevated status in contact with a divine being. Such references in Purāṇa-s and lizard's employment for this sectarian synthesis also convey its large-scale influence. There were many attempts in the subcontinent for the sectarian synthesis (Śaivaites vs. Vaiṣṇavaites, etc.) like the evolution of Hari-Hara-*mūrti* [an idol with a union of Hari (Viṣṇu) and Hara (Śiva)]. A lizard's employment for these social reforms is certainly notable. Concerning the temple architectural interpretations, the temple architecture-related references highlight the bright side of a lizard. Most of the time, they depict the “firmness” of devotion toward a deity. In the case of Joluḷāmbā, a lizard is an initial signal of devastation. Here, we must not forget that it is becoming a “messenger” of the goddess. The list provided in the Marathi with the examples of the *ḍā* suffix indeed suggests the degraded state of a lizard: *tusaḍa* [a curt], *bevaḍā* [a drunkard], *baḍabaḍā* [an excessively talkative], *jaḷakukaḍā* [the one who feels jealously], *theraḍā-mhātāraḍā* [an old codger], *bobaḍā* [an inarticulate], etc., is used for a chameleon – *sara-ḍā*! The Sanskrit word *jyeṣṭhā* is translated as “inauspicious lizard”. The goddess Alakṣmī (“failure”) is considered the elder sister of Lakṣmī (goddess of prosperity). This Alakṣmī is also known as *jyeṣṭā* (elder) in certain places. The paper tries to identify and define the significance of a lizard in the Indian context. It lists the 88 names of a lizard in Sanskrit found in different scriptures. Studying a lizard's symbolism was required in light of these references and occurrences. As mentioned earlier, a study of the symbolic representations of lizards in the Indian scenario is wholly ignored. Likewise, Dhare, while discussing the iconography of Joluḷāmbā (a goddess in Andhra Pradesh, India), clearly ignores the presence of a lizard on the headgear of the goddess [Dhare 2011]. We have dealt with the iconography of the goddess along with a curse mentioned in the Devībhāgavatapurāṇa. In the light of Indian ethos, we have seen an incredible range of diverse belief systems for a lizard; we dealt with its association with the goddess Lakṣmī and as a bad omen. A lizard, its symbolism, etymology, and phenomenological occurrences have been mentioned symbolically in the texts from the Vedas to Tantra and classical Sanskrit literature to scientific treatises. A study concerning these texts has shown the glimpses and benefits of uncoiling the symbolism. Apart from this data, the carvings of a lizard in temples (e.g., the carving

of a lizard climbing on a *śivaliṅga* at the Virūpakṣa temple, Hampi, Karnataka, India) have also made significant remarks to the quest of comprehending the symbolism. The symbolic scenario of a lizard in Indian culture is quite mixed and sometimes unclear. In the symbolic classification, specific names of lizards frequently occur, like *pallī*, *godhā*, *kr̥kavāku*, *saraṭa*, etc. Additionally, their spiritual value is not consistent with their names. Concerning the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of a lizard, it can be strongly noted that the lizard is never represented as a ghost or a malevolent spirit [cf. Forth 2013; Douglas 1984]; it is instead a representation of anthropomorphic beliefs. Stating about the wide range of names for a lizard in Sanskrit, the names are not related to the ethno-taxonomic grounds, but they are associated with the zoological features, sometimes just the way of their existence in nature. For instance, the word *kuḍyamatsyā* denotes a type of lizard that looks like a fish on a wall. The figure 1 gives the possible explanation in English of all the available lizard names. Hence, the culture was more inclined toward abstract symbolism than the classification based on the biological structure. It is also essential to know that the taxonomical treatment given to lizards parallels its symbolic comprehension. To sum up, the culture has widely used the emblematic significance of a lizard in several connotations in the scriptures, art and architecture, and folk traditions. Therefore, the paper has tried to explore and explain the possible ranges in understanding the symbolism of a lizard in Indian culture, and thus the topic can be taken up for further studies about the same.

<sup>1</sup> This list is prepared with the help of different traditional Sanskrit lexicons like Amarakośa, Prayāyaratnamālā, Halāyudhakośa, Vaijayantīkośa, Viśvaprakāśa, Śabdābhedaparakāśa, Trikāṇḍaśeṣa, Anekārthasamgraha, Abhidhānacintāmaṇi, Nānārthārnavaśośa, Medinīkośa, Śabdaratnākara, Kośakalpataru, Kalpadrukośa, Śabdaratnasamunvaya, Anekārthatilaka, Paramānandināmamālā, Paṛyāyaśabdaratna, Pañcatattvaparakāśa, Dharaṇīkośa, Abhidhānamañjarī, Rājanighaṇṭu, Apūrvanāmamālā and different modern lexicons like Apte, Monnier-Williams etc.

<sup>2</sup> The words with the “NA” mark show that some of these names cannot be studied in light of Sanskrit etymology or grammar. There may be some influences of the regional Indian languages.

<sup>3</sup> It is not always possible to find a differentiating line between a lizard, iguana or chameleon based on the data collected. Some names like *hemala*, *vṛttistha*, *krakañcapad*, *kakkinda*, *vedāra*, *drumāśraya*, *kuḷāhaka*, *raktapucchikā*, *citrakola*, *dhundhumāra*, *ṭaṭṭanī*, *bhittikā*, *surājikā*, *suraśvetā*, *grāhiṇī*, *māṇīkyā*, *mūlī* etc. can only be found in the lexicons. There are no textual references available so far for such words.

<sup>4</sup> And also, a rooster in the Atharvaveda 5.31.2.

<sup>5</sup> Prasāda-tīkā on Prakriyākaumudī 2.609.8.

<sup>6</sup> Vaijayantīkośa.

<sup>7</sup> Vācaspatyam and Śabdakalpadruma.

<sup>8</sup> A hater of Viṣṇu and Śiva (two prominent deities in the trinity in Hinduism, the former is also known as caretaker of the universe and the latter one is destroyer of the inauspicious things in the world) shall become a chameleon and mouse respectively.

<sup>9</sup> The one who desires his preceptor’s wife becomes a lizard permanently.

<sup>10</sup> The one who commits a heinous sin gets converted into a chameleon/lizard.

<sup>11</sup> A lizard/chameleon should never be seen if one wishes for auspiciousness. Moreover, at several places a lizard is considered as a bad omen. The animal is oft-used to highlight the importance of donation. A person failing to donate a particular thing gets the birth of a lizard, this belief is seen repeatedly.

<sup>12</sup> A lizard is a sinful entity (literally, a sinful soul). The comment given by Śāṅkarācārya once again emphasizes on the sinful depiction of the creature.

<sup>13</sup> The Nṛgatīrta is known for the lower-grade lizard. See FN 14 for more details.

<sup>14</sup> This is a story associated with the Prabhāsakhaṇḍa located in today’s Gujarat. The place is described as ‘Nṛgatīrtha’ where the king Nṛga was relieved by Kṛṣṇa from the form of a giant

lizard. Erstwhile, the king Nṛga was cursed and converted into the form of a lizard for not giving an appropriate donation.

<sup>15</sup> They saw a giant lizard. The same story narrated in the FN 14.

<sup>16</sup> For hundreds and thousands of years, you (the king Nṛga) shall stay in this (well) for a longer time in the form of a lizard. The same story narrated in the FN 14. The FN Nos. 13 to 16 mentions the same story cited in different texts.

<sup>17</sup> Seeing or even listening to the sound of a lizard and a chameleon is not at all auspicious.

<sup>18</sup> A mongoose and a lizard are the sinners.

<sup>19</sup> A lizard should never be seen while travelling.

<sup>20</sup> It is inauspicious to see a lizard, iguana, snake, skull, and a naked person.

<sup>21</sup> A curse mentioned in the Skanda-Purāṇa – one will become a lizard for the next ten births.

<sup>22</sup> I will become a dreadful python in the third birth, and then in the fourth birth, I shall be a fox. The fifth birth of mine will be of a wild boar and the sixth one of a lizard (births of a demon described in the Purāṇa).

<sup>23</sup> Whoever commits sinful works out of greed and without realization will be ruined at the end like a lizard that eats hailstone (and dies).

<sup>24</sup> Hemāṅga didn't offer/donate water at the (Venkatadri?) and hence he was converted into a lizard due to the sin of not donating water. The same Purāṇa affirms the importance of donating water at the pious place – Venkatadri (now known as Tirumala Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India) *venkaṭākhye mahāpūṇye tṛṣārtānām viśeṣataḥ. Jaladānam akurvānas tiryagyonim avāpnuyāt. Tasmād venkaṭaśailendre yathāśakty anusārataḥ.*

*jaladānam hi kartavyam sarveṣāṃ jīvanam mahat: A highly pious pilgrimage called Venkatadri is very important. If one does not donate water at the pilgrimage, then he gets deceived into a lower-birth of birds. Henceforth, it is highly recommendable to donate water at the pious place as per one's own capacity (cf. FN 14).*

<sup>25</sup> Jackals, mice, lizards, rabbits, men, goats, spotted antelopes, swans, and pigs participated in a *devāsura-yuddha* (a war between gods and demons). Here a *kṛkalāsa* participated in the war.

<sup>26</sup> This citation from the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa means, the lord of wealth in the form of a lizard appeared from the sacrifice.

<sup>27</sup> Lizard is the lord of wealth. This one and the previous reference (FN26) is an oft-found positive relation between Kubera (a god of wealth) and a lizard.

<sup>28</sup> If somebody touches a corpse and enters the area of Varāha then this is the ill-effect: taking the form of a lizard.

<sup>29</sup> *Godhā* (iguana) was on the emblem of Uma (goddess) and so it was on her flag.

<sup>30</sup> A sister of a demon called Vyomāsura (a demon) is compared with a lizard. She is being considered as harsh as a lizard.

<sup>31</sup> Vedic Literature, as usual, exhibits a wide range of these words. A separate study is required to deal with the minute details.

<sup>32</sup> Offering the animals like lizard (or chameleon or iguana or alligator) to the bearer of a bow (Rudra?).

<sup>33</sup> A lizard should never be killed.

<sup>34</sup> A red-headed lizard should be killed (Here, the word *kṛkalāsa* can also be meant for a rooster).

<sup>35</sup> Association with the sun (cf. lizard's name *pratisūrya*, *pratisūryaka*, and *pratisūryaśayānaka*).

<sup>36</sup> *kṛkavāku* is a rooster here (cf. Maitrāyaṇīsamhitā 3.14.15, Kāṭhakaśamhitā 5.7.8, Atharvaveda 5.31.2, 20.136.10, Nirukta 12.13). The word is parallelly used for a rooster and so for a lizard due to their relation with the sun.

<sup>37</sup> This is a legend ascribed in the name of Indra (also see Ṛgveda 8.91). According to the citation and the narrative mentioned in the Ṛgveda 8.91, a girl named Apālā was rescued by Indra from skin diseases. Indra pulled her from the holes of a wheel. Some of her skin impurities were converted into a lizard.

<sup>38</sup> The spit after chewing a betel-leaf, that goes on the skin of a lizard.

<sup>39</sup> A ritual indicated here that uses the blood of a lizard. See FN 40 for details.

<sup>40</sup> The citations of the Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati and Nāgārjunatantra mention this ritual. A thread should be hued with the blood of a lizard and a green-coloured snake. If a woman crosses this thread, she will suffer with phenomenal bleeding. The only remedy to cure this wound caused is crossing the thread back. This shows a place of a lizard in the *kṛṣṇa-yātu* (black-magic).

<sup>41</sup> The goddesses (guardians of quarters) are described here that change their forms. Godhī goddess resembles with the crow-faced goddess. The goddess Yamamathanī resembles with Kṛkalāsī. In this Tāntric text, Godhī and Kṛkalāsī (literally lizard-form deities) are connected with a crow and Yama (the God of the death). Here, the latter one is significant in light of a lizard's all-pervading malevolent nature. These goddesses can be seen in this image as well. A group of goddesses arranged around the central form of Vajrayogini. "The final group of eight are the outer retinue and have four figures with bird and animal faces and four with human-like faces. In the East is blue Kakasya; North, green Ulukasya; West, red Shvanakasya; South, yellow Sukarasya; South-east, blue-yellow Yamadadhi; South-west, yellow-red Yamaduti; North-west, red-green Yamadanshtini; North-east, blue-green Yamamathani..." (Image credits and information available at: <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/73824> (accessed February 17, 2023)).

<sup>42</sup> Literally means, there was a village name called Godaka. A rambled teacher (*Ācārya*) nake Saraṭaka used reside in the village. It has no direct relation with the lizard. However, the line is in the witty sense and the bold part has semantic association with a lizard. The phonetic consonance of these names is noteworthy and interesting with respect to the names for a lizard in Sanskrit.

<sup>43</sup> A red-faced monkey should be petted in a stable to expel the lizards.

<sup>44</sup> An ornament described here that is made up of a lizard and snake.

<sup>45</sup> One which rolls down like a necklace around a neck.

<sup>46</sup> *Yām te cakruḥ kṛkavākāvaje vā yām kurīrīni.*

<sup>47</sup> The one who produces a peculiar sound *kṛk-kṛk*. It is an onomatopoeic adjective.

<sup>48</sup> Śabdakalpadruma.

<sup>49</sup> Lexicons like Rājanighaṇṭu, Viśvaprakāśa, Trikāṇḍāśeṣa etc., Rāmāyaṇa 3.28.5. Brahmani means a priest-lady.

<sup>50</sup> *kṛkalāso dhanādhyakṣaḥ.* (Rāmāyaṇa 7.18.5).

<sup>51</sup> The sculpture is from Halebidu, Karnataka, India, 12<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>52</sup> Viśvakarmavāstuśāstra 16.2 and 16.8.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bhaviṣyapurāṇa 1.138.39, Rūpamaṇḍana 5.4.

<sup>54</sup> Image courtesy available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/asienman/10905066465> (accessed October 11, 2022).

<sup>55</sup> Image courtesy available at: <https://www.dtnext.in/spirituality/2020/01/27/touch-these-gold-silver-plated-lizards-to-lift-your-lizard-based-doshas> (accessed October 11, 2022).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *saraṭānām ca jālāni prabhavanti gr̥he gr̥he*. This is a curse and it means that there will be multiple lizards in one's house if he/she fails to worship the goddess (Devībhāgavatapurāṇa 6.3.16).

<sup>57</sup> Image courtesy available at: <https://religionworld.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/09/jogulamba.jpg> (accessed October 11, 2022).

<sup>58</sup> A regional story.

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### **Місце ящірки у священних книгах, скульптурі та системах вірувань Індії**

У науковому світі добре відомі дослідження, присвячені символіці ящірки. Проте багато науковців не звертали на них належної уваги. У світлі індійського етосу ми маємо неймовірно різноманітні системи вірувань, пов'язаних з ящіркою; десь її обожають як богиню Лакшмі, але зустріч із нею вважається також поганою прикметою. Було знайдено 88 санскритських назв ящірки. Деякі з них дуже типові й частовживані, як-от *godhā* (godhā), *pallī* (pallī), *sarata* (sarata), *крикаваку* (kṛkavāku), але зустрічаються також різноманітні нетипові назви: *tattānī* (tattānī), *даруматсьягвая* (dārumatsyāhvaṃyā), *брагмані* (brahmaṇī), *лалантіка* (lalantikā) тощо. Зібравши “ящіркову” лексику, ми знайшли в санскритській літературі яскраві й захопливі згадки про неї. Ящірка символічно згадується в різних текстах: від Вед до тантри, від класичної санскритської літератури до наукових трактатів. Щоб розкрити символізм ящірки, вкрай необхідним є вивчення цих текстів, храмового мистецтва та систем вірувань. Отже, метою статті є усвідомлення і розкриття на основі літературних джерел та храмового мистецтва символізму ящірки в індійському етосі. Намагаючись висвітлити кілька моментів, ми в цій статті: 1) навели перелік санскритських назв ящірки й дали загальну оцінку її позитивним і негативним характеристикам; 2) зібрали, проаналізували й інтерпретували згадки про ящірку в літературі (обмежилися тільки санскритськими текстами; література поділена на такі категорії: “Вірування, пов'язані із заслугами й гріхами”, “Міфологія”, “Ведійська література й тантра”, “Різне”); 3) дослідили таку матеріальну спадщину, як храмове мистецтво, зокрема ікону в храмі Гойсалешвари (Галібіді, Карнатака, Індія), зображення богині Джогуламбі (Аламपुर, Андгра-Прадеш, Індія), храм Вірупакші (Гампі, Карнатака, Індія) тощо; 4) дослідили кілька своєрідних місцевих систем вірувань Індії.

**Ключові слова:** ящірка, godhā, pallī, символізм, індійська культура, санскритські тексти, скульптура

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