



New Evidence of a Kushan-Period Ekamukha Shiva Linga from Uparala–Gularia, Bareilly “Gulariya gauri shankar shivling”

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Abstract

This research paper presents a preliminary study of a remarkable *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* located in the Gauri Shankar Temple at UparalaGularia, Bareilly District (U.P., India). According to local tradition, this Shiva Linga was discovered from the ground, after which the present temple was constructed at the site. The object is made of red sandstone and features a distinct human face with three eyes carved in relief. A comparative study was undertaken with the *Kushan-period Ekamukha Shiva Linga (Catalogue No. G.2)* preserved in the Lucknow State Museum. Both objects exhibit striking similarities in material, style, and craftsmanship. Preliminary observation suggests that the Bareilly specimen belongs to the Kushan period (1st–3rd century CE). This study not only highlights a significant regional archaeological heritage but also reinforces the cultural and historical importance of ancient *Ahichhatra*, the capital of the Panchala kingdom. “The present paper is based on the author’s original field discovery and documentation of a previously unreported Kushan-period Ekamukha Shiva Linga.”

Keywords: *Kushan Period, Ekamukha Shiva Linga, Red Sandstone, Bareilly, Ahichhatra, Ancient Sculpture*

1. Introduction

The Bareilly region, known in antiquity as *Ahichhatra*, was the capital of the PanchalaMahajanapada. Within this cultural context, the discovery of the *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* at the Gauri Shankar Temple in UparalaGularia assumes special significance. The present research aims to examine its historical context, artistic features, and cultural implications.

2. Site and Object Description

- **Location:** Gularia Uparala, Aonla Tehsil, District Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India¹
- **Google Map Code:** C535+PJF
- **Coordinates:** Latitude 28.404157° N, Longitude 79.158907° E
- **Object:** *Ekamukha Shiva Linga*
- **Material:** Red Sandstone
- **Current Status:** Installed and worshipped within the temple precincts
- **Dimensions:** Height approx. 53 inches; circumference 42 inches; facial relief 19 × 13 inches
- **The face** of the Ekamukha Shiva Linga is oriented towards S 162.2°, i.e., approximately South–South–East (SSE) direction.

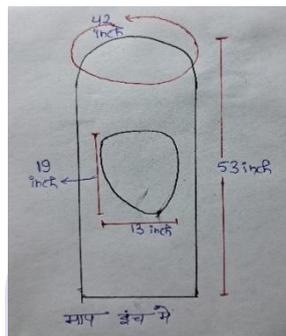


Image1.measurement of gulariyagaurishankarshivling

3. Methodology

- On-site inspection and measurements
- Detailed study of surface, carving, and facial features
- Comparative analysis with the *Ekamukha Shiva Linga (G.2)* in Lucknow State Museum²
- Review of secondary sources on Kushan art and Shaiva iconography

4. Preliminary Analysis

The Shiva Linga bears a prominent human face in relief, featuring three eyes, nose, and lips distinctly carved. The top portion shows signs of damage, possibly due to weathering or human intervention. The local community identifies it as the *Gauri-Shankar* form, after which the temple is named.



Image 1. Gulariyagaurishankarshivling

5. Comparative Study

- Both Lingas are *Ekamukha* (one-faced).
- Both are carved in red sandstone.
- Stylistic similarities include the facial modeling, proportion, and chiseling technique.
- The Bareilly Linga is larger in scale, reflecting local variation and regional importance.



image 2. Kushan-period *Shiva Linga* located at Gauri Shankar Temple, UparalaGularia (general view). *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* from the Kushan period preserved in the Lucknow State Museum (comparative view).

6. The Ekamukha Shiva Linga (G.2), Lucknow State Museum

The *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* (Catalogue No. G.2) preserved in the **Lucknow State Museum**² is a highly significant example of Kushan-period Shaiva art. It was discovered from the ancient site of **Bhita**, near Prayagraj (Allahabad), and dates to around the 2nd century CE.

Carved in red sandstone—characteristic of the *Mathura school of art*—this Linga represents one of the earliest attempts to endow the aniconic symbol of Shiva with a human face. According to **K. N. Dikshit (1939)**³, “*Lucknow Museum G.2 exemplifies the earliest attempt of giving human form to the linga.*”

The Linga bears distinct features—mustache, circular eyes, matted hair, and a crescent moon on the forehead. The refined finish, smooth surface, and balanced proportions reveal the maturity of Kushan craftsmanship.

Pratapaditya Pal (1985)⁴ described it as representing “*the transitional phase from aniconic to iconic representation of Śiva,*” marking a major transformation in Shaiva worship. Similarly, E. B. Havell (1913)⁵ regarded it as an early anthropomorphic expression of Shiva symbols in Kushan art.

The *Catalogue of the Archaeological Section* (Vol. I, 1954) of the Museum records it as “*Ekamukha Lingam, Bhita, Kushan Period.*” This validates its provenance and authenticity.

Artistically, the G.2 specimen reflects the mature idiom of Kushan-era Mathura art. Later developments such as *Chaturmukha* and *Panchamukha* Lingas of the Gupta period evolved from this prototype. Religiously, it signifies the rising tide of Shaiva devotion in the Ganga–Yamuna doab. Thus, the *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* (G.2) at Lucknow stands as an authentic testimony to the Kushan-period Shaiva symbolism and a vital link in the evolution of Indian iconography.

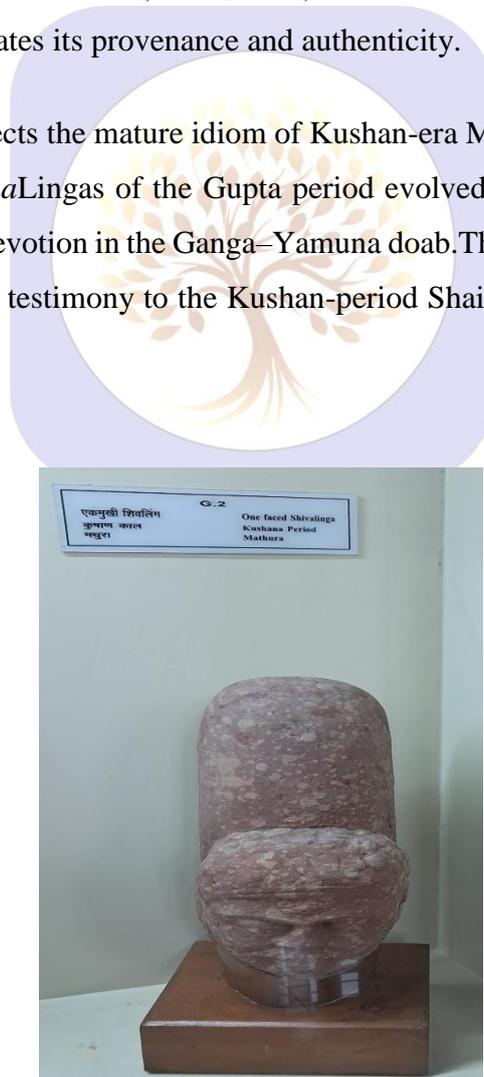


Image 3. The Ekamukha Shiva Linga (G.2), Lucknow State Museum

7. Kushan-Period Forms and Artistic Tendencies of Shiva Lingas

The Kushan era (1st–3rd century CE) represents a critical phase in the artistic evolution of the Shiva Linga, where the earlier abstract, aniconic form gradually acquired anthropomorphic features, producing *Mukhalingas*—Lingas with one or more human faces.

According to Z. Kolah (2000)⁶ in “*The Linga Aspect in Indian Art — Shiva*” (JSTOR, p.3), “*The Mauryan and Kushan periods exhibit truly realistic or anatomically faithful appearance of the erect phallus.*” This denotes a move toward naturalism and ritual realism.

P. Pal (1985)⁴ further emphasized in his study “*Some Mathura Sculptures of the Kushan Period*” that *Mukhalingas* from the Mathura school mark a key innovation in Shaiva iconography, which later culminated in the Gupta and medieval periods.

Similarly, the *Asian Art Museum Exhibition on Mukhalingas*⁷ explains:

“*During the Kushan period (1st–3rd century CE) in north India, human faces came to be added to the lingams, reflecting the growing anthropomorphic tendency in Shaiva worship.*”

Collectively, these studies confirm that the Kushan period was a transformative era in which the symbolic Shiva Linga gained expressive, humanized form—bridging the gap between abstract divinity and tangible deity.

8. Discussion and Interpretation

During the Kushan period, red sandstone sculpture flourished in Mathura and its surrounding regions. The *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* of this period reveals the theological transition from *Rudra* to *Shiva*. Despite the prominence of Buddhism, Shaiva worship persisted strongly in the Doab region. The Bareilly specimen from UparalaGularia appears to be part of this same artistic and religious continuum, embodying both the technical finesse and the devotional intensity of the age.

9. Local Significance and Future Research Prospects

- A rare and valuable heritage for the Bareilly region.
- A primary source for studying local religious and socio-cultural life.
- Potential for more archaeological remains buried in the vicinity.
- Future scientific analyses (e.g., **petrography, stratigraphy, TL-dating**) can help confirm its precise chronology.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

1. The *Ekamukha Shiva Linga* at UparalaGularia is a Kushan-period sculpture made of red sandstone.
2. Its stylistic and material parallels with the *G.2 Linga* in Lucknow suggest a common cultural phase.
3. Surface damage underscores the urgent need for preservation.

4. A detailed scientific study and conservation initiative should be undertaken by the ASI and related authorities.

11. Illustrations/ images



All images were taken by the author during the 2025 field survey.

12. References

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