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Ganesh: The Benevolent

Pratapaditya Pal

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A familiar, well-loved figure in the art and religion of Asia, the elephant-headed Ganesh is universally revered as the god of auspicious beginnings. Despite his popularity, the jolly, pot-bellied deity has received far less attention in literature than he deserves.

This present authoritatively researched volume attempts to collate existing reference material on the subject, as also offer valuable original insights into various aspects of Ganesh.

The diversity of the benevolent god's representations is amply illustrated in the survey of the British Museum collection in London. An article on the Hindu Ganesh discusses his importance in Maharashtra where the annual festival is observed with fervor. Subsequent essays examine the iconography of the dancing Ganesh and the deity's place in Tantric literature, and in the Buddhist and Jain traditions. Travelling with Buddhism to Southeast and East Asia where he developed distinctly local characteristics, Ganesh is today especially favored in Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia. In a more personal vein, an avid collector writes of his passion for Ganesh.

Although his career began as a humber leader of Shiva's hosts, Ganesh subsequently emerged as a supreme deity and, simply, a god who removes obstacles and grants success. And despite his strange appearance, he has inspired countless artists over the centuries to create his form with sensitivity and a touch of whimsy.

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