

GANDHARVAS & KINNARAS
IN
INDIAN ICONOGRAPHY

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the boulder depicting the penance of Bhagīratha for the descent of the Ganges (known erroneously as Arjuna's penance). Here they are shown with short crowns, flying in the air towards the flow of the currents of the Ganges, with bunches of flowers in their hands. But in these cases, the Gandharvas are not usually depicted in their capacity as musicians at Indra's court. Their features are commonly described in their human form without a supernatural or fabulous air about them.

(iii) The Gandharva and Kinnara figures in mediaeval art.

The richest collection of the demi-gods comes from Pahārpur an ancient site in Bengal. The figures are *terra cotta* and are delineated in numerous plaques as flying either singly or with the Vidyādharas or the Apsarasas their female counter-parts (see the *Arch. Survey Memoir*, No. 55, Excavation at Paharapur-Bengal, p. 62 ff.). Among the semi-divine and semi-human subjects treated by the Paharpur artist, the Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Vidyādharas, Kīrtimukhas or lion faces and Nāgas are noteworthy. The Gandharvas are depicted with their legs covered by lotus-shaped boots, turned upwards in the act of flight, their bodies floating in space. In some cases, they hold a sword and a noose or a garland of flowers in their hands (see plate) In one plaque the Gandharva is represented as letting loose a broken necklace, the pearls dropping on the floor in a heap (see plate). It is surprisingly interesting that the Gandharva is found in one instance as riding on rhinoceros (see plate) which feature is rarely met with in other figures of the deity. The Kīrtimukhas whose origin may be traced to the fertile decorative genius of the Indus valley artist whose productions in *terra cotta* objects are marvellously conventional and hybrid in character with various kinds of human and animal combinations, are very common in Indian architrave and their auspicious character is usually indicated by the issue of strings of pearls or lotuses from their mouths. They lend a supernatural air to the structures and the impression receives further strength by the introduction, along-



Rajashahi, Paharpur *Terra-cotta* plaque, showing
Gandharva riding Rhinoceros — (Page 38)