

Chapter V

Iconography of Vaisnava Avataras

Introduction :

Iconography is the tangible expression of religious symbolism. As such it puts into visual form the abstract concepts and attributes associated with details. It supplies, therefore a large volume of material for the study of religious history. Successive stages in the growth of religious ideas are reflected in the icons and their attributes, produced in the corresponding periods, from which one can obtain an authentic picture of the development of various cults. Iconic representations invariably carry the mark of the age in which they are executed and on the basis of their style the period of the evolution of the various forms of the deities may be determined.

Iconography provides an important tool for the interpretation of the socio-economic changes occurring at the microlevels. While

study of the Hindu Iconography as a whole would present a complete picture portraying the hold of the faith on its followers through the ages at the micro levels region wise study would bring out the peculiarities of a particular area in relation to its socio - religious context in greater depth and detail. Regional differences and chronological variations both in conception and execution make such a study imperative.

Sources for the study of Hindu Iconography are rich and varied and fall under the usual major category. The vast mass of sacred literature in Sanskrit which may be classified as Vedic Puranic and Agamic provides a useful background to the study of Hindu Iconography.

Iconography of Vaishnava Avataras as being studied now is based on any age old pattern. The same old pattern of identifying images with the help of the some certain marks and attributes is invariably being followed. It was absolutely necessary at a time and is still useful. But for making the iconographic studies more comprehensive and lively than these are, it is necessary to look at the icons from various angles. What is more needed in this respect is the application of various literary and epigraphical records which are rarely been dealt, putting face to face with iconography. For example, many times the epigraphical passages specially the invocatory verses, enlighten the student of Iconography more than so many heavily strained, pedantic and descriptions of the Silpa

Sutras. The reason is that the said various forms of the epigraphics of literary compositions while giving a minimum possible description of the image, speak more on its beauty and aesthetic appeal. They characterise a charm born of natural and spontaneous description which is often very suggestive and unconsciously point out the most noteworthy features of Iconographic representations. In other words the Shilpa texts very consciously enumerate each and every minute detail of an image. The various literary texts and epigraphs illuminate the same truth from a different angle which is found more lively, suggestive and full of devotion. The Silpacaryas, the writers of these verses had not to bother about acute details of the image formation as it may already be before them to see and visualise the beauty, the form and the gracious identity of the icon. These consciously made remarks of the poets of the epigraphical verses.

Iconography of Matsya Myth

Matsya and Kurma, the first two of the ten incarnations of Visnu, are minor ones compared to his other incarnations. They are neither often adorned and exacted in the religious texts nor usually represented individually in stone and worshipped by the people. However, in no way does this undermine their importance, nor does it imply more accidental connection with the Visnu. The fish and the tortoise forms of Visnu represent an important aspect

of that great god, and therefore due importance must be given to their symbolic significance.

The symbolic significance of the fish in the early period is attested by a couple of finds from Sarnatha and Mathura. A pillar from Sarnatha contains a fish god with two tails. It is a human form living a fish for the lower part of the body. Another fish god is engraved on the belt of a human figure from Mathura. The significance of these fish god is not yet explained but it indicates that the symbolism of fish as the water of life and creation had been realized through its relation to Visnu is not yet clear.

The image of fish incarnation of Visnu is to be made in the form of a fish with a horn according to the Visnu Dharmottara Purana.

Another such representation of Matsyavatara is found in a panel of the left inner pradaksinapratha of the Laksmana temple at Khajuraho. Visnu is seated in the Yogasana on a fish with two lower hands in the dhyana-mudra, the upper two hands hold the mace and disc. On either side of the deity are seen figures with folded hands, who may be identified as the accompanied by Manu.

The fish incarnation executed as half man and half fish, has been referred to by R.C. Kak. This image having from Ramanagar in Jammu is of crude workmanship and not much importance. As a small panel on the top row of the eastern wall of the Gouri temple

at Bhuvaneshwara contains a similar image of the Matsyavatara. The four handed image of Visnu issues from the neck of the fish, holding his usual emblems.

The Matsyavatara depicted as a fish on the full blown-lotus, is known from Garhwa in Allahabad district.³ Behind the fish are seen four standing figures with folded hands.

A beautiful image of the fish incarnation has come to light from Chamba belonging to about the eleventh century A.D. A large fish is supported which rises a pillar. The capital of the pillar supports a three handed Brahma and four other duties in the abhaya-mudra. Laksmi is seen below the head of the fish. Above its tail is donor. an elegant composition of fish incarnation has come to light from Chamba. (Fig. 53. C1)

The Udaipur museum also has a slab depicting Visnu's incarnations. A large fish is on the top of the panel and below it are the four emblems of Visnu, placed between the coils of naga. (Fig 56. c2)

Iconograhly of Kurma Myth

Like Matsyavatara, Kurmavatara also is rarely sculptured and worshipped. There are no variations or complications in the iconographical details of the Kurma. According to the Visnu dharmottara Purana and Agni Purana the image of the Kurma is

to be made exactly in the form of a tortise. One of the most interesting images of the Kurma incarnation is in the collection of the Bharata Kala Bhavana Benaras. A tortise with well recunded shell and rather long neck is placed on a pedestal. A striking feature of this image is the presence of a small four handed figure of Visnu holding its usual emblems, on the left leg is folded as in the Varaha images as if representing its emergence from the waters. This image is suitable to the 9th century A.D. and was probably used in worship somewhere in the religion adjoining Benares.

An image of the Kurmavatara from Garhwa is reproduced by B.C. Bhattacharya. Though the purposes of the sculpture is mainly to represent the Kurmavatara, he has also combined with it the charming of the ocean episode. A big tortise is placed on floral pedestal with its head stretched out. Above it on the panel can be seen a rod round by the serpent coil. On the left of the staff appears three figures holding the serpent coil and a similar figure is seen to its right. The three figures on the left are adorned with the Jatamukha while the one on the right has the Kiritamukha probably indicating the demons and the gods. On either side of the Kurma are two figures with folded hands.

In the right and back inner pradaksinapatha of the Laksmana temple at Khajuraho, the Kurmavatara is represented in an interesting manner. Lord Visnu is seated on a tortise in Yogasana

with his two lower hands in the Yoga-mudra and the other two holding the disc and the mace.

Some of the later Sanskrit texts have described the image of Kurma in its anthropomorphic form. According Sri Tattvanidhi, Kurma should be of golden colour holding in the two hands the disc and the conch and the other two hands should be held in the abhaya and the Varada-mudra. He should be adorned with pitambara and ornaments. The Sattrata Samhita and the Meru Tantra also describe the image of Kurma holding the conch, the disc, the mace and the plough. Images corresponding to these dhyanas have not come to light so far.

The Kurmavatara had almost escaped the attention of the worshippers of Visnu. In literature also, there is hardly anything written containing an invocation or appreciation of Kurma. The rarity images of the Matsya and Kurma Avataras may tempt one to conclude that these Avataras had hardly any relevance for the worshippers of Visnu but at the same time there is every possibility that there might have been a small number of Vaisnavas who worshipped these Avataras. There are all the possibilities that there are the primitive cults and later the Brahmanic tradition incorporated high symbolic significance.

Iconography of Varaha Myth

According to Iconography, the Varaha images have two forms. It can be either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic. The Visnu dharmottara Purana describes various forms of Varaha as follows.

"Varaha should be represented on Sesa, having four hands with beautiful jewelled hood, his eyes full of sonder looking at the goddesses. In his natural hands should be placed the ploughshape and the club and his other two hands should be held in the anjali-mudra. He should be adorned with snakes. In another form he is seen in the alidha, pose on sesa. On his left arm rests the goddess earth, with both of her hands engaged in salutation. He holds the club in his upper lefts hand. The other holding the disc, may be raised in order to kill the demon Hiranyaksha.

There is another way of representing Varaha where he is seated in meditation like the sage Kapila. He may also be shown holding a pinda, symbolizing the earth, with his two hands. The fourth type represents his amongst many demons as the very personification of anger. He may either have a human form or the form of a boar while uplifting the earth. None of these forms described in the Visnu dharmottara Purana appear in iconography. The earliest image so far found is unique from the iconographical point of veiw.

It is an inscribed image belonging to the Kushana period,

preserved in the Mathura Museum. The four-handed Varaha with his lower arms akimbo, holds in his upper hand a sun disc. The earth goddess is supported on his shoulders and seems to be touching his mutilated snout. The Srivatsa mark appears on his chest. To the right of the main image a gandharva and the figure knocked down on the floor may be the demon Hiranyaksa whom Varaha had defeated as mentioned in the Visnudharmottaram. To the left is a devotee standing in the anjali-mudra. The two sun discs in the hands of Varaha signify his connection with the sun.

Several images of Varaha belonging to the Gupta period testify to the strong prevalence of Varaha worship in that period. The *Mudraraksasam* a drama supposed to have been written in the Gupta period, also refers to it. Its concluding verse compares the great victory of Chandragupta with Varaha's conquest of the Earth. *Caturbhani* refers to Sukara-Siddhi and indicates that the wrestlers propitiated him for strength.

Mahavaraha holds the lotus and the mace in his hands. The goddess, whom he has brought up by his pointed tusk, is seated on his left arm holding a lotus. Her eyes are full of wonder gazing at her lord. The right hand of the god is placed on his waist. One of his legs on the Kurma and the other one rests on the hood of the serpent Sesa.

Generally the four-handed Varaha holds either three or sometimes four emblems in his hands, however, it is also possible

to find the four-handed Varaha without any of the Vaisnava emblems, for instance, the Varaha image found from Rajim has four hands, the front two clasped near the chest, the lower right is hanging down and the lower left is placed on the folded left knee. The left leg of Varaha is placed on the hand of a naga in human form seated below with the hooded head. The Earth goddess is seen as in the other images, seated on the below of the god. In the adjacent slab are carved many naga figures in the anjali-mudra paying their reverence to the god.

The post-Gupta and mediaeval period have produced innumerable Varaha images all over Northern India. The most common type is the image with four hands, the right hands holding the mace and/or the lotus, and the left hands holding the disc and the conch. Sometimes the disc is held in the right hand instead of the left. One of the distinguishing features of some of the Eastern Indian images of Varaha is that between his legs, there appears a small figure of the boar and the goddess Prithvi by its side indicating Varaha's dive into the primaeval waters to rescue the earth, and the principal image indicating his emergence out of the waters.

A small shrine at Devangana near Abu contains an image of Varaha belonging to about the eighth century A.D. The god seizes with his lower hands two nagas by their tails. They are worshipping the god with folded hands. The upper right hand of Varaha holds

the disc the upper left arm, supporting the goddess on the elbow is mutilated. The lower right hand, besides holding the tail of the nagas is in katihasta-mudra and the lower left hand holds the tail of the naga as well as the conch. Below on the left side stand two figures with folded hands. The leg of the god is supported on the hood of the naga couple who are also seen paying their respect to the god. This peculiar feature of seizing the Nagas by their tails may indicate the conquest of Varaha over the demigods of the nether world whom he had subdued. A verse in the Agni Purana describe the image of Varaha holding the serpent Sesa in his hand. But expecting this stray reference, no other text on iconography has any reference to this particular feature of Varaha's iconography.

A very elegant image of Varaha belonging to the 9th century is in the Jhalawar Museum. In one of the right hands he holds the mace whereas the other holds the tails of the nagas one of whom makes an appearance under the mace, passing behind the leg of Varaha. The goddess is standing in the dvibhanga pose on a small lotus held in his left hand, Sankha Purusa and Cakra Purursa flank the main image. There is an unidentifiable female figure sitting above Sankha Purusa. The image of Varaha is fully adorned and has a dagger attached to the belt.

An almost identical image of Varaha is in the shrine of the Sachia Mata temple at Osian, near Jodhapur. Here, the god has

seized the nagi with folded hands, by her tail. In the upper right hand the god holds the mace while in the left hands are placed the conch and the disc. On the folded upper left arm of the god is seated the goddess Prithvi holding lotuses in her hands. The bent left leg of the god is placed on the full-blown lotus which is supported by naga couple. There is probably a dagger attached to the belt of the god. The image is a beautiful specimen of the western Indian art of the late ninth century.

It is evident from the few images described above that this particular representation of Varaha holding the naga or nagas in the hands, is a peculiar feature of western India.

The Gwalior Museum has in its collection two peculiar images of Varaha, both belonging to about the 9th century. One four-handed Varaha holds the mace in his upper right hand the lower right is in the Katihasta-mudra. In the upper and the lower left hands he holds the disc and the conch. The goddess Earth is seated cross-legged on the folded upper left arm of the god, with one of her hands touching the snout of the boar and the other resting on a long stalk, on the either side of which is seen a naga and a nagi. The second image is almost identical with the one described above, except for the order of the conch and the wheel in the left hands of the god. A very noteworthy feature of these images is the small dagger attached to the belt of the god on the right side.

According to the Matsya Purana, Silparatna and

Devatamurtyprakarana, etc., one of the legs of Varaha is to be supported by the Kurma and the other by the nagas, but all the images referred to so far place the naga or the naga-couple below his left foot, the Kurma below the right leg remaining absent. Fortunately, a couple of images have come to light in that tally exactly with the descriptions given the Silpasastras.

One in the collection of the Allahabad Museum found from Khajuraho is a fine specimen of this type. Varaha with the Earth goddess on his upper left arm, has one of his legs resting on a lotus held by a naga couple and the other is placed on the back of the Kurma. His lower right hand is in the Katihasta-mudra, upper right hand holds the mace, the upper left hand holds the disc and the lower left is broken. Below on the either side are seen the devotees. This richly-ornamented figure of Varaha has the small dagger attached to his belt.

One notable feature in this image is the presence of Dhyani Visnu on the top of the panel. He is seated on a lotus forming the canopy over the head of Varaha. His two front hands are in the dhyana-mudra, the other two probably hold the lotuses. A much mutilated figure of Varaha preserved in the State Museum, Lucknow, also has a Kurma below his right leg.

One may question the propriety of Kurma who is one of the incarnations of Visnu, appearing as a subsidiary figure under the feet of Varaha. But in this class of images, it seems to signify,

like the naga figures associated with the god, the nether world which the god had entered to rescue the goddess Earth. It is unlikely that the tortise below Varaha represents Kurma incarnation of Visnu.

The Sanskrit sources describe some other forms of Varaha which, however, have not been sculpturally represented in Northern India. The Skanda Purana describes the image of Varaha having four hands, two of which hold the conch and the disc and other two are in the abhaya and the Varada-mudra. Though no such image has come to light from Northern India, this form is not unknown in the south.

The Iconography of Varaha prescribed by the Tantric texts is more elaborate. According to them Varaha is endowed with multiple hands, holding the disc, the conch, the sword, the dagger, the mace and the lance, while two of his hands are required to be in the abhaya and the varada-mudra. He should be accompanied by the Earth goddess. Besides these, according to the Meru tantra he is to be flanked by the goddess Bhumi and Laxmi.

The classification of the Varaha images in the south Indian texts is in three forms, viz. Bhavaraha, Yajnavaraha and Pralayavaraha. Bhavaraha has the human body and the boar's face. Two of his four arms hold the conch and the disc. One of his left arms supports the legs of the Earth goddess, seated on the god's bent right leg, while the right one embraces the goddess round her waist.

Yajnavaraha should be seated on the throne, with Laksmi to his right and Bhumi to his left, both of them holding the lotuses. The god should hold the conch and the disc in two of his four hands.

So far the anthropomorphic representations of Varaha have been dealt with. The zoomorphic form of Varaha is not discussed in detail by the Silpasastra texts but the sculptors have tried to carve him profusely in this form. The representation of this form of Varaha does not seem to be very popular in the Gupta period. It seems to have become favourite in the mediaeval period only.

An image of Mahavaraha, the earliest of this kind, is found at Earn in the Sagar, District.³ It is huge figure of the boar with the figures of rsis and deities; carved on its body. On one side of his neck is seen the Earth goddess hanging by the tusk of the boar, with her left arm, exactly in the way the goddess accompanying Nrvaraha from Earn referred to above. In front of the boar is a naga in human form. There are several rows of devotees. In the ear of the boar appears a flying figure. Near his neck is a belt with some unidentifiable figures carved on it. Brahma is seen on its head. The image is datable to the 5th century A.D.

It is clear from the iconographic representations of Varaha that the cult had a wide prevalence right from the time of the Guptas. Individual temples, dedicated to Varaha, are noted in some inscriptions. The stone pillar inscription from Earn, Central India, belonging to about the 5th century, mentions a temple of Varaha.

The copper plate inscription of the time of Budhagupta, found from Damodarpur in Bengal, records the erection of Sweta Varaha Temple, somewhere in Nepal. The shrine of the Varaha temple of Gupta period still exists at Deogarh. The king Bhoja Deva of Kanauj had issued the Mahavaraha coins. Thus, it is evident that the Varaha cult had attained the royal patronage and was able to maintain its high position continually till the late mediaeval period.

Iconography of Nrsimha Myth

The image of Nrsimha is described in brief in the Harivamsa. It only states that Nrsimha tears open the demon with his nails, and holds in his hands the thunderbolt, the lance and the sword.

The Visnudharmottara gives us a detailed description of the images of Nrsimha. It says :

"The Nrsimha image has strong shoulders, waist and neck. The middle part of his body and belly are lean. He has the face of a lion and the body of a man and his face is haloed. His ornamented image in alidha pose wears a blue garment. His face and mane are flamboyant. He is to be represented as tearing the bosom of Hiranyakasipu with his sharp claws."

Another variety of Nrsimha image is also described by the same text.

"He should be represented as seated on a simhasana with his feet resting on the hands of Prithvi. Two of his hands should be placed on the mace head. His body should be surrounded by flames and he should hold in his hands the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus. His hair is flamboyant."

It seems, however, that the sculptors of the Gupta period hardly took into consideration the injunction given by the Visnudharmottaram, because from a number of Nrsimha images available from the Gupta period, there is none that tallies exactly with the description given above.

One of the most interesting early representations of the Nrsimha incarnation is executed on a seal found at Basarh, 2 datable to the early Gupta period. Nrsimha with a lion's face and a human body, is seated on a high pedestal in the lalitasana pose, with the left leg folded and the right hanging down. His right hand is raised up in the abhaya-mudra and his left hand is supported on his knee. The small inscription below on the pedestal is not decipherable. The demon Hiranyakasipu is conspicuous by his absence, and so also are the typical emblems of Visnu. The vanamala hanging up to his knees, however, indicates him to be a Vaisnava deity. Another remarkable feature is that he is only two-handed unlike the other image. The Gwalior Museum has a similar Nrsimha image found at Besnagar, belonging to the Gupta period. It is also a two-handed image supporting a thickly maned lion head

on a standing human body. Both of the hands being broken, nothing can be said about the emblems held by them, if any. The vanamala is seen hanging down upto the knees. Behind his leg is probably a small pillar indicating his emergence from it.

A peculiar image of Nrsimha is represented in the Chaitya window of the famous Dasavatara temple at Deogarh. The god is seated on a full-blown lotus in ardhaparyankasana. His upper right hand holds the mace, and the lower right, supported by his folded right knee, holds the disc. The upper left hand holds the conch and the lower left is placed on the thigh. The fierce lion-face is surrounded by the thick locks of the mane spreading on the shoulders. The ornamental mukuta is an uncommon feature for the Nrsimha images of the Gupta period. The sculptor has tried to create an impression of flames around his head in the form of a halo. To the left of the deity is a devotee in the anjali-mudra.

Before we proceed further with our inquiry about the iconography of Nrsimha, it is necessary to refer to a unique representation of the same found in a hillock near Kondamotu, 40 miles away from Guntur in a brick shrine, related stylistically to the Nagarjunakonda sculptures. The main figure of Nrsimha is flanked on the right side by two and on the left side by three figures. Nrsimha is represented as a couchant lion with stout legs. The srivatsa appears prominently in the centre of his chest. At the level of the neck, this lion, has two human hands holding the mace and

the disc. To his right, the figure in abhaya-mudra and the conch in his hand, may be identified with Visnu. A figure holding the sugarcane bow in his right hand and a makara standard in his left hand stands to the right of Visnu; he is probably Kama. To the left of Nrsimha figure in tribhanga pose holding a flute and the bow, may be that of Krsna. Next to him may be Balarama holding a wine goblet in his right hand the left arm is akimbo. The last figure carrying the sword and the shield in his hands may be that of Aniruddha. This panel perhaps represents the Nrsimha and the Pancavira worship, and if the interpretation is correct, it is a very strong evidence supporting the prevalence of the Pancavira worship in the early Bhagavata religion.

One remarkable feature of the most of the Nrsimha images of the Gupta period is the absence of the demon Hiranyakasipu with whom he is so closely associated. The Vaikhanasagama describes the single images of Nrsimha as the Kevala Nrsimha, but the images referred to above do not tally with that description. Kevala Nrsimha has either two or four arms. If he is four-handed, the upper right hand should hold the disc and the upper left hand should hold the conch. The front two hands should be resting on the knees. Girija-Nrsimha, another variety of the single Nrsimha, should be shown seated on a padmasana in the utkutika posture, the forelegs being supported in this position by the Yogapatta. Nrsimha seated with the Yogapatta round his legs is commonly found in the south rather than in the north.

The number of Nrsimha images found from the Gupta period is itself a testimony to the prevalence of the Nrsimha cult in that period. The Gupta images of Nrsimha are not only numerous but are equally varied from the iconographical point of view. These iconographical forms could not have been evolved without the strong patronage and support to the cult by the people. It is likely that the Gupta kings patronized Nrsimha worship, since the last of the Gupta kings is named after the deity.

In the post-Gupta period, Nrsimha is almost invariably represented as killing the demon Hiranyakasipu. This emphasis on the destruction of the demon is reflected in the dhyanas given in the post-Guptas texts. For instance, the Matsya Purana describes vividly the fight between the demon and the god. According to it, the image of Nrsimha is to be made eight-handed, fierce and having the face of a lion with thick mane. He should be shown to be tearing out the entrails of the demon. Their legs should be interlocked and the demon with a sword and shield should be shown attacking the god.

The Agni Purana describes the four-handed image of Nrsimha. Two of his hands should hold the disc and the mace, and he should be striking the bosom of the demon with the other two. The demon should be lying on his left thigh. According to the other description given in the same Purana, he should hold the disc and the conch in his two hands and other two should be engaged in killing the demon.

There are large number of four-handed images of Nrsimha found in different parts of Northern India. As they are iconographically almost the same, it is not necessary to describe them here in detail. The Khajuraho Musuem has an image of four-handed Nrsimha in its collection with two upper hands in the abhaya-mudra and the front two hands engaged in destroying the demon as usual. He does not hold any emblem in his hand.

The six-handed variety of Nrsimha image has not been referred to by any text on iconography, so far as is known to us. The Rajivalocana temple at Rajim in Madhya Pradesh, contains a six-handed image of Nrsimha, datable to the 7th century. Here Nrsimha is standing on a demon lying prostrate holding a sword in his hand. The right leg of the god is placed on the hips and left leg is on the tilted head of the demon. He is strangling Hiranyakasipu who is resting on his folded leg. The two upper hands are completely mutilated.

There is another such image of Nrsimha in the collection of the Decca Museum. The two natural hands are engaged in the tearing open the entrails of the demon, the lower two hands hold tightly the hair and the legs of demon and the upper two hands hold the attributes which are not clearly visible. The bent left leg of the god is crushing the chest of another recumbent demon. A remarkable feature of this image is that sculptor has tried to narrate the complete myth of Nrsimha in stone and so we find the

right of the main figure a small pillar surmounted by a lion head, symbolically representing the sudden appearance of the god from the pillar.

An image found at Vikrampur is another such representation of Nrsimha. He is standing on a recumbent demon on the lotus pedestal. He holds the demon Hiranyakasipu by his hair and the leg, the two front hands are occupied in tearing out the entrails of the demon. The upper right hand is probably in abhaya-mudra and the upper left one in the tarjani-mudra. Below the lotus seat is carved the figure of Hiranyakasipu kicking the pillar out of which emerges the small figure of Nrsimha. To right of the pillar stands Prahlada in worshipful attitude. At the end, on the right side of the pedestal, appears Garuda with folded hands.

An interesting 9th century image of Nrsimha from Chamba exhibits two different unidentifiable mudras. The figure is seated on a simhasana with both of his legs hanging down. The god wears only a lion-cloth. His two natural hands support his chin and the other two hands are in tripataka-mudra, the significance of which is not yet known. A small piece of cloth tied to the figure just below the chest, may have some esoteric significance or may be a yagapatta. On the pedestal are carved two miniature figures of the Man-lion. It is a very forceful representation of the Man-lion with rolling eyes, open mouth, and expanded nostrils. His thick mane is spread over his shoulders. It is remarkable that the god

does not hold any of the Vaisnava ayudhas.

The six-handed variety of Nrsimha was evidently very popular in mediaeval Northern India. It does not differ very much from the four-handed variety because the purpose of the two additional hands is merely to hold the demon, who is lying on his lap, by his hair and leg. The eastern Indian variety has a peculiarity of its own. The eastern sculptors have a tendency to narrate the legend of Nrsimha in the same panel, and the method is to carve the important incidents of the myth by the side of the main figure or below on the pedestal, as in the Trivikrama images.

The eight-handed variety of Nrsimha is described in some Sanskrit texts besides Matsya Purana and the Vaikhanasagama. The Silparatna gives a detailed description of the images of Nrsimha. According to it, the "image of Nrsimha must have a fierce lion-face and eight hands striking the demon with his finger nails lying on his lap holding sword and shield, pulling out the entrails of the demon with two hands. The remaining right hands should hold the disc and the lotus, and the left hands the mace and the conch.

The Devatamurtiprakarana also gives a similar account of the Nrsimha image but instead of four ayudhas god is said to hold only two; the remaining hands are occupied in killing and striking the demon.

The Lucknow Museum has a beautiful image of the eight-handed Nrsimha which is interesting from the iconographical point of view. The execution of the elaborate iconographical details, and its superb artistic quality class it among two of the most interesting images of Nrsimha, datable to 9th Cent. The upper hands hold the nagapasa. Together with the end of the nagapasa the upper left hands also hold a shield. The second pair of the hands holds mace and the disc; the third pair is broken and the fourth pair is engaged in tearing out the entrails of the demon lying on the folded right leg of the god. Below this is represented a defeated demon fallen on the ground. The goddess, with lotus in her right hand, to the right of the main figure, is probably Laksmi. A (attendant) figure to his left is holding a snake in his hand. Brahma and Siva are carved above on the panel.

The presence of the nagapasa may point to Saivite or Tantric influence on the Nrsimha cult. Nrsimha with the pasa in his hand is described by the later texts like the Parameswara Samhita. It prescribes the lotus, the goad, the pestle, the disc, the conch, the bow and the arrow, the noose and the mace in the hands of Nrsimha.

Another image holding the pasa is in the collection of the Gwalior Museum. The four-handed god holds in his upper hands the pasa.

The Nrsimha image is sometimes even endowed with multiple

hands. The ceiling of the Jain temple of Vimalavasah contains a twelve-handed Nrsimha with his legs intertwined tightly with the legs of the defeated Hiranyakasipu. The palm of the upper right hand of the god is stretched out near his forehead as if in the abhaya-mudra. The second right hand is also in the abhay-mudra. The third hand is in the act of tearing open the bosom of the demon, the fourth is holding a mace, the fifth is piercing the abdomen of the demon and the sixth is holding his leg. On the left side, the first two of the hands broken, the third is proceeding to attack the demon, the fourth and fifth hold the disc and an indistinct object and the sixth is tearing open the entrails of the demon. The gods rolling eyes, and rolling tongue give him a fierce look.

We may here refer to some of the dhyanas of Nrsimha with the multiple hands and emblems, though they are of a later date. In the Paramaeswara Samhita he is described as Sandarshana Nrsimha. "He has reddish tawny eyes and hair, red garments, fierce face and tusks, carved eyebrows and flamboyant forehead, and rolling eyes. He stands in pratyahidha posture. He holds in his sixteen hands, starting from the first right : javelin, sword, fire-bowl, goad, shaft, spear, battle-axe, disc, bow with arrow, noose, ploughshare, thunderbolt, mace, pestle and trident.

He is endowed with thirty-two hands by the Naradiya Maha Purana. In the right hands there are discus, lotus, battle-axe, noose, ploughshare, pestle, goad, pattisa, (a weapon with three

points), bhindipala (short javelin), sword, club and tomara, and one is in the abhaya-mudra. In the left hands three are conch-shell, shield, noose, sula, fire-pot, spear, bundika, karmuka (a bowl-shaped instrument), tarjani-mudra, mace, damaru and surpa (winnowing basket), and one is in the varada-mudra, He strikes the demon on his heads and wilt, the other two he holds up his entrails; another pair is engaged in tearing open his bosom.

Iconography of Vamana Myth

The iconography of Vamana or the dwarfish is simple but the descriptions given in the Sanskrit texts are varied. The image of Vamana shows him either as a mendicant or a brahmacarin. The only emblem to be held by Vamana according to the Visnudharmattaram is the staff. " The god Vamana should have crooked limbs and a fat body. He carries the staff and is prepared for studies. His colour should be dark green like the durva grass and he should wear an antelope skin.

The Agni Purana prescribes the umbrella and staff his embles, if the figure of Vamana is two-handed.

The representation of Vamana in any of these forms is rather rare. The Bhagavata Purana gives quite a detailed description of the image. The emblems to be held by the deity are the umbrella, the staff (danda), and the kamandalu full of water in his three

hands, while the fourth hand is in the abhaya-mudra. He wears an antelope skin, the yajnopavita, etc.

Sometimes he holds the emblems which are in no way relevant to the role he plays as an Avatara. For instance, according to the Pauranakarma, he should hold the Sarnga, the bow in his three hands. The emblem to be held in the fourth hand is not mentioned.

The Gandharva Tantra imagines the image of Vamana just like that of ordinary Visnu images, holding the peculiar emblems of Visnu.

"Bhakta (Vamana) has lotus-like eyes and fair golden colour. He should hold in his four hands the mace the conch, the lotus and the disc.

A number of the four-handed mediaeval images of Vamava holding the emblems of Visnu are available. It deserves attention that the early images of Vamana, like the description given in the early texts cited above, are invariably two-handed.

A beautiful four-handed image of Vamana, pot-bellied standing on a lotus pedestal, datable to the 9th century A.D., is preserved in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benaras, the lower right hand is in the varada-mudra, the rest of the hands hold the mace, the disc and the conch. Sridevi and Saraswati flank him and below on the pedestal are represented the devotees with folded hands.

A very image from Dinagpur, is the collection of the Asutosh Mesuem, the disc and the conch, stands on lotus pedestal flanked by sri and sraswati.

The Vamana figure by the goddess Sri and Saraswati is described in the Kalika Purana. It says : " Fair like the moon, wearing yellow garments, standing on Garuda, the four-handed god holds in his upper right hand the mace, in the lower right hand the pot of water, in the upper left hand the flaming disc, and in the lower left the conch. His chest is marked with Srivatsa and the Kaustubha. He has on his left side the quiver full of arrows, and on his right side the Nandaka sword. He is adorned with a tiara, earrings and vanamala reaching up to his knees. To his right side stands Sri and Saraswati."

So far no image of Vamana carrying the quiver is available, but an image with the Nandaka sword attached to the belt has come to light from Narwar, datable to the 11th century A.D. now in the Gwalior Mesuem. The small figure of Vamana carrying the mace, the disc and conch in his three hands, the fourth being in Varada-mudra. The long ear-lobes and the curly hair remind one of the Buddha figures. A donor couple, devotes ayudha-purusas flank the central figure. Arround the panel are depicted the avataras of Visnu, also Brahma and Siva, and on the top is an unidentified figure in dhyana-mudra.

Later Tantric texts, like Meru Tantra, describe a very peculiar

from Vamana, termed Dadhi Vamana. The texts prescribed that Vamana should carry pots, full of curds and water in his hands. The idea behind this form seems to indicate Vamana symbolizing the creative principle of life as represented by the water and curd. According to the same text Vamana should meditated upon as standing under the golden umbrella flanked by the goddess Sri and Bhumi. He should hold in his left hand a golden pot filled with water. The description of Vamana in the Saradatilaka is almost the same.

So far such of Vamana has come to sight.

The image to be executed to the Visnudharmottara Purana is very peculiar. It says:

"The image of Trivikrama should be like the cloud laden with water, (of dark shade) and in his right hands he hold the staff, the noose, the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus. With his other two hands he should blow the conch.

The Matsya Purana, the Manasollasa etc. do not throw much light on the iconography of the Trivikrama image, hence for the most we have to rely on the Vaikhanasagama and the Atri Samhita.

The Vaikhasagama divides the image of Trivikrama into three varieties according to the level of the upraised left foot. It should either to be the level of the right knee, to the navel or to the forehead intended to represent him in the act of striding over the

three worlds. It should have either four or eight hands. If he is four-armed, one of the right hands holds conch, and one of the left hands holds the disc. One of the right hands should be help up with the palm upwards, and the other left hand should be stretchied out paralled to the uplifted leg.

If image is eight-handed, then five of his hands should carry the conch, the disc, the mace, the bow and the plough and the others carry the symbols of the four-handed image. His right leg should be firmly planted upon the Earth and the left should be used in taking the stride. Indra should be shown to be holding an umbrella over Trivikrama's head, Varuna, Vayu, Surya and Chandra attend on him with flywisk. Brahma should be shown washing the uplifted leg of Trivikrama. Siva with folded hands should be sculptured on the panel. Below his left leg is represented the drawfish figure of Vamana with an umbrella in his hands, rady to receive the grant of his wish from king Bali who stands opposite to him holding a water vessel indicating that he is ready to pour the sacred water as an act of final dedication. Sukracharya, his guru, should also be present there.

From the Katra Kesavadev at Mthura has come a panel showing the Trivikrama incarnation of Visnu (assignable to the early Gupta period.), now preserved in the Mathura Musuem. It is very difficult to describe the image in detail because the panel is in a baly mutilated condition. A figure is seen with left leg stretched aloft at the end of which is seen a demon head.

A very interesting image of Trivikrama has been found from Rajim, in the Raipur district, Madhya Pradesh. The four-handed god holds in his upper two hands the disc and the conch. The lower right hand is the *katihasta-mudra*. He is shown to be crushing the demon head with his lower left hand also by his vigorously outstretched left leg. Below the left leg is represented the serpent Sesa, seated in human form on his own coils with his hands in the *anjali-mudra*. No other accessory figure attends the deity. This figure dates back to early 7th century.

There are two fine Pala specimens of the Trivikrama incarnation in the collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta. One of them represents the whole episode on its minutest details. The god stands with his right leg firmly planted on the pedestal and the left leg raised upto the waist. His upper two hands hold the mace and the disc, the lower right hand near his waist holds the lotus and the mutilated left hand probably held the conch. Below on his right side the goddess Sri. To the left, under his left leg is seen Vamana holding an umbrella in his hand. The king holds a water-pot in his right hands as if pouring the sacrificial water symbolising his the readiness to offer the gift to Vamana. This scene depicts the earlier part of the legend when Vamana approached the king at the time sacrifice. As soon as the king gave him the gift by symbolically pouring water, he assumed the Viraja or gigantic form depicted in the main sculptor. It is a vivid execution of the particular scene described in the Harivamsa, in the line :

A peculiar image from Abdullapur, in Bengal, depicts Trivikrama in accompaniment of the consorts of Visnu-Sri and Saraswati. The ornate figure of Trivikrama holds the mace, the disc and the conch in his hands. The right leg is firmly planted on the lotus pedestal and the left is raised aloft, with the miniature figures of the king and the dwarf below it. On either side of the god appera Sri and Saraswati standing on lotuses.

In the group of temples at Osian, near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, are preserved some representations of Trivikrama. One on the outer wall of the Sachiya Mata Temple, shows the four-handed Trivikrama drushing the head of the demon with his left leg raised aloft. Of the four-hands, his lower right hand is in the katihastamudra, the upper right holds the disc and the lower left holds the conch. Below his left leg are the king making his offering, Vamana with an open umbrella and other attendant figures. A figure, evidently the king, is shown holding the right leg of the god and above him appears a horse symbolising the horse sacrifice.

Iconography of Parasurama Myth

The iconography of Parasurama is simple and unvaried. According to the Visnudharmottara he should have a jata on his only emblem is the axe The Agni Purana prescribes four hands to the image of Parasurama holding the bow, the arrow, the axe and the sword.

The Vaikhansagama describes two varieties of image of the Avatara. One is two handed and the other is four handed.

The two handed image should have the axe in the right hand and the left hand should be in the suci-mudra. He should wear jatamukuta, yajnopavita and other ornaments. If the image is four handed, it should hold the visual attributes of Visnu.

An image has been discovered in Timba, a village near Amreli in Gujarat, belonging to the Gupta period. It is a mutilated piece and hence its exact identification is difficult but an axe in the right hand of the figure indicates that it may be the representation of Parasurama. If the identification is correct, the image is the earliest document to testify to the prevalence of Parasurama worship in Gujarat.

On the left outside wall of the Parasurama temple at Khajuraho are two images possibly of Parasurama, both of them holding a fruit, the conch, the lotus and the battle-axe. The attributes of these images are quite different from the attributes suggested by the Sanskrit texts cited above.

A beautiful image of Parasurama has been reproduced by Bhattasali, N.K. The god holds in his two hands the battle-axe and the disc, the lower right hand is in varada-mudra and the lower left hands the conch. Below on the pedestal is a small figure of Garuda with folded hands. This image, standing in the tribhanga pose, is a fine specimen of the 11th century art of eastern India.

A late mediaeval image of four-handed Parasurama is found from Chamba. He holds the mace and the conch in the lower hands and the upper ones hold the battle-axe and the bow.

There is a very peculiar representation of Parasurama at Basohli, on the opposite wall of the Basoli of Dhan, three miles away from Thara-Kaswal on the way to Kuhn. The second panel on the wall beginning from the upper end depicts a fight between two persons, one of whom is multi-armed and the other carries a battle-axe his right hand. With the left hand he has caught the hair of his opponent. Only five of the multiple hands of the other figure are visible carrying the mace, the sword, the kukri, the dagger, etc. This obviously depicts the fight between Parasurama and Kartivirya Arjuna. The image belongs to the late mediaeval period.

The images of Parasurama are very few in number. All those that have come to light are also datable to the mediaeval period. The utter absence of Parasurama images, excepting these stray ones, makes it obvious that this Avatara, exerted only a limited influence on the Vaisnava devotees. This being a minor avatara, temples were not usually dedicated to him. There are a couple of temples of Parasurama in Gujarat probably owing to his traditional association with the river Narmada where Jamadagni's hermitage was supposed to have been situated.

Iconography of Rama Myth

The image of Rama, according to the Visnudharmottara, should be adorned with all the royal marks of a king. His brothers Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrugna are also to be carved in the same manner.

In the Agni Purana Rama is described as holding the bow, the arrow, the sword and the conch.

It is rather surprising that we do not meet with such cut images of Rama, described above, in the early centuries of the Christian era, but Ramayana had such a great impact on the people that various episodes from the life of Rama are profusely carved on the walls of the early temples. So far, no shrine dedicated to Rama has come to light before the mediaeval period. Though no cult image of Rama has come to light before that period, it will be interesting to describe here some of the panels on the outer walls of temples, depicting the Ramayana scenes.

The transformation of Ahalya : Rama transformed Ahalya into a woman, who was cursed by her husband to turn into a stone in the forest till Rama would come and redeem her.

A panel on the plinth of the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh represents this episode. The background of the panel is covered with trees and leaves indicating a forest scene. On the left of the panel is a figure with matted hair having a quiver behind his

shoulders and a bow in his left hand. He is shown to be seated on a stone slab by the side of which appears a female figure worshipping him. She must be Ahalya who was transformed to stone by her husband. Lakshmana with a bow in his hand is standing behind Rama. The bearded figure to the right is the sage Visvamitra.

The same scene is also carved on the wall of the Patthara Chati temple at Nalanda. On the fourth panel of the east face is a two armed standing male figure, apparently Rama, holding an arrow in the right hand and a bow in the left hand. A kneeling female with folded hands is seated to the right of Rama. A tree and little foliage in the background indicate it be a forest scene.

A panel of the stone temple at a Nalanda depicts Rama and Sita in Pancavati. A male and a female figure are seated side by side as if covering with each other. The male figure wearing a Channavira is holding a bow under his left arm.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had visited the hermitage of Atri and his wife Anasuya, on their way to the forest. One of the panels illustrating the Ramayana scenes on the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh, represents three male and two female figures in the grove. Two men are sitting on stone slabs and the third one Lakshmana is standing between them armed with a bow. The figure on the right holds the manuscript in his hand and the other one is in the vyakhyana-mudra, indicating him to be a sage. One of the

female figures is seated on the floor on a mat and is being blessed by another female figure, representing Anasuya blessing Sita.

Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, was enamoured by Rama and Lakshmana when she saw them in the forest. Hence she went there and tried to lure them away but could not succeed. Thinking that Sita is the cause of her failure, she tried to harass her and consequently Lakshmana got so angry that he cut her nose. This popular incident is also depicted on the wall of the Dasavatara temple.

Rama helped Sugriva, the ape-king, to regain his power which was forcibly taken away by his own brother Vali. Lakshmana garlanded him for his victory. A panel on the Dasavatara temple illustrates this. Lakshmana is holding a garland in his hand intended for the monkey chief Sugriva who is represented by his side, with the face of an ape on a human body.

A mutilated terracotta in the Patna Museum depicts Rama and Lakshmana with monkeys, in search of Sita. The human figure wearing a crown is Vibhisana whereas the monkey with a crown is Hanuman.

There are few other terracotta reliefs illustrating the Ramayana scenes. The last relief represents Hanuman bringing the mountain on which grows the life-giving drug for Lakshmana who had fainted due to many injuries on his body.

Two images of Rama are also to be found in the Khajuraho group of temples. On the left, outside the parsvanatha temple is an image of Rama holding the bow and the arrow. Another image at the same place shows Rama and Sita in alingana-mudra. the four-handed Rama holds in his upper two hands the bow and the arrow, with his lower hand he blesses Hanuman seated at his right foot and with the upper left hand he embraces his consort. Sita embraces Rama with her right hand and holds a lotus in her left.

In a niche on the wall of Amba Mata temple at Osian, datable to the 11th century A.D. there is a standing image of Rama and Sita. It is completely like the Lakshmi-Narayana images. Rama holds the four emblems of Visnu and with one arm he embraces Sita. The only identifying mark is the figure of Hanuman standing to the right of Rama. He has the face of a monkey on a human body.

It will be interesting here to refer to some of the dhyanas of Rama in brief. Rama is sometimes described as being honoured by several sages. In the Ramarcana Candrika, Rama is described in the palace at Ayodhya. He is seated on the Pushpaka throne, with Sita and Lakshmana to his left. He is adored by sage and the grahas.

The same manuscript prescribes a form of Rama to be meditated upon by those desirous of moksa. He is to be invoked as in varasana near the river Sarayu. One of his hands should be in

the jnana-mudra and the other should be placed on his thigh. He is to be accompanied by Sita and Lakshman.

According to the Silparatna, Rama is to be accompanied by Sita only. Rama seated in the virasana shows the jnana-mudra with one of his hands and the other rests on his lap. By his side is Sita with a lotus in her hand.

Rama and Lakshmana in the forest are described in the Padma Purana. It says : "Rama proceeded to the other forest after tying his hair in a jata with a thread of his yajnopavita, wearing valkala garments besmearing his body with ashes, wearing a rudraksamala and is followed by Lakshmana.

Generally Rama is accompanied by Lakshmana and Sita but the Purana Karma describes him accompanied by his father : "Rama having broad and tender eyes like lotus is accompanied on the right side by Dasaratha anxiously looking at his son, a little behind him stands Lakshmana holding an umbrella. There appear Bharata and Satrughna and in front stands Hanuman soliciting the grace of Rama.

Rama in the reclining position is also sometimes worshipped. According to the Atri Samhita, Rama is reclining his head in the lap of Sita and Lakshmana should be shown to be shampooing his feet.

Most of the dhyanas referred to above are much later in date

but they are cited just to bring to the fore the number of varieties of Rama images that evolved in that period. The Ramayana seems to have become popular in the Gupta period as we find it sometimes illustrated in stone on the walls of the early temples. It is surprising that very few Ramayana scenes have come to light from the western India till the mediaeval period, and even those that are found are negligible. The Ramayana had a deep impact and it spread even outside India, in Thailand and Cambodia. But still the Rama worship, forming its own separate and distinctive cult, does not seem to have existed before the mediaeval period, because as far as is known to us, the sculptural evidence to prove its existence is not abundant. The incarnation of Rama definitely remains a minor one till the late mediaeval period, and a very strong prevalence of the Rama cult is only a relatively later growth.

Iconography of Krsna Myth

Though the cult images of Krsna make their appearance very late, Krsnavatara itself seems to have been very popular right from the Gupta period, just as it happened in the case of Rama, but in the case of Krsna only his childhood feats are very popular.

The Harivamsa gives a detailed account of Krsnalila which is not to be found anywhere in the Mahabharata itself. The Bhagavata Purana, the sacred book of the Bhagavatas or Vaisyas till the

present day, follows to a great extent the Harivamsa. All the childhood stories of Krsna and Balarama are not chiselled in stone but the sculptors made use of some of the important episodes favoured commonly by the people.

The main story begins with the birth of Krsna in the jail. Immediately after his birth, Devaki handed over the child to Vasudeva in order to exchange him with the child of Nanda as already enjoyed by Visnu himself. A panel at the famous Dasavatara temple at Deogarh depicts a woman handing over a child to a male figure, evidently to Vasudeva. He is standing to the left of the female figure, Devaki, and taking away from her the newborn babe. A couple of panels on the same temple also represent Vasudeva fondling the child with whom he has soon to depart. These panels are mutilated and have retained only a child being swung in the hands of a male figure. An 8th century panel at Paharpur in Bengal also shows Vasudeva with Krsna in his hands before exchanging him with a child of Nanda.

A panel datable to the Kushana period, preserved in the Mathura Museum, depicts the episode just after the birth of Krsna. The child Krsna was carried in a basket to Gokula, crossing the river Jamuna. He was protected by a serpent with his hood from the torrential rains. There at Gokul, Vasudeva exchanged his baby boy with the daughter of Yasoda and quietly returned to Mathura. The river in his panel is indicated by the ripples carved on the

surface and also by a number of aquatic animals like crocodile, tortoise, etc. Near the bank of the river is seen a stout person with a basket on his head, supported by his hands. In front of them is a seven hooded serpent advancing towards the opposite bank.

Nanda and Yasoda with Krsna and Balarama : This panel on the Dasavatara temple at Deogarh shows Nanda and Yasoda with the babes in their hands. A few cows are seen beside Yasoda. Most important feature is the dress of Yasoda, typical of a cowherdess. The dress is still prevalent among the milkmaids of Saurashtra.

Several exploits are attributed to Krsna in his childhood but all of them are not depicted in stone, and hence we come across only the principal and popular events of his life, which are dealt with in order of sequence.

Sakatabhanga : Once Yasoda had gone to the river Jumna leaving the child Krsna alone playing under a cart in front of their house. When Krsna felt hungry he started crying and throwing his arms up and down, and with one of his legs he hurled down the whole cart.

The depiction of this event has survived on some of the early panels on temple walls. The famous Dasavatara temple at Deogarh has a panel on its plinth showing a child reclining on a bed under the cart which is being hurled down with its left foot. The cart has

a small floral decorative pattern on its sides and contains a number of pots in it. the female figure, standing in front, is amazed to see the strenght of the child.

Putana-vadha : Kamsa had employed a demoness of his court named Putana for the destruction of the child Krsna. She took the form of a damsel and come to Nanda's house at midnight. She had gone there to suckle the child with venomous paste applied to her breasts. But instead of being poisoned by her, Krsna sucked out her soul through her breasts.

A panel of the outer wall of Harihara temple I at Osian sows Putana being sucked by the child Krsna standing before her.

Yamalarjuna-bhanga : Once when yasoda was tired of this naughty habit of Krsna, she tied him to a grinding stone with a rope. Krsna dragged himself to the river bank where stood the trees of Yamala and Arjuna. he tried to pass through them and while doing so the trees were hurled down and uprooted by the force of the big stone tied to Krsna. The Bhagavata version mentions that these trees were two yakas, who had been cursed to go to the earth in the form of trees till Krsna would deliver them.

These incidents are not related in the Harivamsa, but the Bhagavata Purana does refer to them.

Kaliya Mardana : One of the most favourite exploits of Krsna in his subjugation of the serpent Kaliya. There stayed in the waters

of Jumna a serpent named Kaliya, who had poisoned the waters of the Jumna. Once Krsna thought of destroying it for the sake of the people. So he jumped from a Kadamba tree into the river and subjugated him.

A styled representation of the episode is executed on a niche of Harihara Temple I at Osian. On the left side are depicted a tree, evidently the Kadamba, and a child trying to climb it. It represents the earlier part of the story when Krsna climbed the Kadamba tree and jumped into the river. To its right is seen Krsna attacking the Kaliya who is in half-human and half-serpent form. His head is surmounted by serpent hood. His tail is wound round Krsna's waist. Krsna seizes his hand with one hand and the other is raised up to attack him. His left leg is folded as if to trample the serpent. Krsna is shown as a child with curly hair and he is wearing short tunic.

A panel on the west face of the Laksmāna temple at Khajuraho represent a four-armed Krsna trampling upon the tail of the serpent with his right foot. He carries a lotus stalk in his two lower hands. The end of the lotus stalk held in his left hand is inserted into the mouth of Kaliya to indicate the threading of his mouth. The upper right hand of Krsna is held over his head in a dancing position and the lower one holds the disc. Kaliya is represented in human form with a beard and a canopy of serpent hood. His hands folded in the anjali-mudra.

A beautiful illustration of the Kaliyamardana scene is found on the ceiling of the shrine of a 10th century temple at Asodara in Gujarat. Krsna is seen dancing on the hood of a serpent who is represented in human form with folded hands. In the uplifted right hand Krsna holds a flute and the left one is placed on his chest. On the either side of them are three nagis, carved in a half-human form, in the anjali-mudr. Their tails are entwined with the coils of Kaliaya forming a big circle around them.

It is very stylistically represented in a temple at Manod, a vilage near Sunak. A four handed Krsna holds the usual emblems of Visnu and he has placed his right leg on the shoulder of the serpent, depicted as usual in human form with the anjali-mudra. The entwined tails of the serpent and his two queens form an intricately carved circular pattern. Cousens has wrongly identified the panel as Visnu seated on Sesa.

Govardhana-dharana : The next important episode that has acquired the utmost popularity is the Govardhana-dharana. The story of Govardhana-lila, when Krsna resuced the people from the heavy rains by lifting up the mountain to shelter them, is too well-known to be related.

A much-mutilated panel of the Kushana period in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan in all probability, illustrtaes this episode. Only the head of the main figure has survived and above the head is what looks like a clear representation of a mountin. If the

identification is correct, it is one of the earlier representations of Krsna-lila scenes, so far known to us.

A complete and detailed execution of the scene is found on the panel of a doorjamb from Mandor datable to the 5th century A.D. The sculptor has followed in many details the description given in the Harivamsa. The panel itself is divided into three parts, the uppermost representing the seven-peaked mountain. On the right side of a mountain peak is seen a lion and on its left a lioness, and below them are two serpents - all upset because of the uprooting of the mountain. The major portion of the middle part of the panel is covered by a big figure evidently Krsna supporting the mountain by his upraised left hand. To his left are seen the small figures of cowherds and cowherdesses. The one uppermost, trying to support the mountain, may be Balarama. The lower part of the panel shows cows and other animals whom Krsna sheltered under his protection. Apart from being an early piece, the panel is interesting as it depicts the incident in its minutest details, quite unlike many other such representations.

An image of Krsna supporting the mountain, datable to the 5th Century A.D. is preserved in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan.

A similar figure from Kara, belonging to the 5th century A.D. is preserved in the collection of the Allahabad Museum.

A fairly good number of Krsna Govardhanadhari images bear testimony to the popularity of the theme as early as the Gupta period, especially in the adjoining regions of Mathura where he enacted these exploits.

Thus, of all the episodes concerning the exploits of Krsna, Govardhanadharna is especially favoured by the people throughout the centuries. In the earlier period, it acquired great importance in Uttar Pradesh and in the later period in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Kesivadha : An important feat of Krsna after this is the destruction of the demon Kesi who attempted to kill Krsna in the form of a horse. He stayed in the forest near Vrndavana and once when Krsna went there with his friends Kesi rushed to attack him on his chest with his two front legs. But Krsna inserted his hand into the horse's mouth and killed him.

The incident is illustrated on a west face panel of the Lakshmana temple at Khujuraho. It shows Krsna accepting the present of the scented paste from an ugly looking woman standing to his left. Balarama, standing to the right of Krsna, is canopied by a serpent hood and has his right hand in the abhya-mudra nad his left hand holds the plough.

Destruction of Kuvalayapida : In front of the court of Kamsa, Krsna destroyed the elephant who tried to attack him.

At the court of Kamsa, Krsna and Balarama were asked to

wrestle with the well-known wrestlers of the court. In no time Krsna and Balarama killed both of them.

The childhood fets of Krsna are over with the death of Kamsa. His later life is generally not depicted in stone. A 5th century panel from Garhwa, preserved in the collection of the Lucknow Museum, represents Krsna witnessing the fight between Bhima and jarasangha. krsna is shown holding the four usual emblems of Visnu. To his right is a mutilated figure of Arjuna with a blow and arrow in his hands. To the left of Krsna are Bhima and Jarasangha engaged in a fight. Bhima has grasped with his hand the neck of Jarasangha and his left leg is thrown round his waist. The slab might have provided a panel in any temple.

The survey in the foregoing pages would show that the images of Krsna till the mediaeval period are more illustrative reliefs than static cult images. Excepting the evolution in the stylistic features, there are no iconographic emblems particularly attributed to Krsna. The tendency is always to show him as a child with the vyaghranakha, still in use for children in India, and the Kakapaksa style of hair, falling down on th shoulders in the shape of crow's feathers. Though he is recognized as an incarnation of Visnu, very rarely do we see him having four hands. He is depicted as the most human of all the incarnations.

Several incidents of the life-story of Krsna are variously portrayed on the panels of the Dasavatara temple, in the 7th

century temple at Sirpur, on the 8th century panels of the Paharpur temple and in the 10th century panels of the Paharpur temple and in the 10th century Lakshmana temple at Khujaraho.

Apart from these, the texts on religion and iconography also describe Krsna in his various other aspects. Krsna is described as accompanied by his wives Rukumini and Satyabhama, in the Visnudharmottaram and the Vaikhanasagama. The Vaikhanasagama describes Krsna as Parthasarathi, riding a chariot with Arjuna. In his left hand he should hold the reins and his right hand should be in the anjalimudra. The Bhagavata Purana refers to Krsna having four hands, holding the usual four emblems of Visnu and adorned with ornaments. As in sculpture the dalliance of Krsna with the gopis hardly forms the subject of the early texts on iconography. The Padma Purana gives a brief description of Krsna and a gopi under a Kadamba tree. Krsna has placed one of his hands on her shoulder. The image is two handed playing upon the flute. There is a group of gopis to his right and other gopas to the left. Below on the panel are also some animals and other figures worshipping him. An eight-handed image of Venugopala has come to light from Kathial in north Punjab, belonging to about the 12th century.

Iconography of Buddha Myth

Buddha was added to the list of the incarnations of Visnu, only after the Gupta period. Though several Puranas refer to Buddha as an incarnation of Visnu.

The image of Buddha does not carry any of the Vaisnava emblems according to the injunction of Agni Purana. He has a very benign and calm appearance, long ears and a halo behind him. He is seated on a high lotus pedestal and his hands are in the abhaya and the Varada mudra. The term Urdhava Padma is significant as the images of Yoga Narayana are sometimes shown to be seated on a high lotus with a long lotus stalk beneath, a characteristic which is a very peculiar of some Buddhist images. It may be conjectured that the sculptor might have tried to represent Buddha incarnation through the image of Yoga Narayana.

The Iconographic manuals like Hayasirsha Samhita (23.24-36) do better justice to the image of Buddha as an incarnation of Visnu. He is prescribed to be represented as seated in the lotus posture (Padmasana gatam) covered in the clothes of an ascetic (Chivaralankrtam). His face must be like lotus, His eyes also like lotus. (padmasana padmalochana) He must be shown as deeply absorbed in meditation but one of his hand lifted up (Samadhisthottana Panim). His ears must be long (Pradmb-karna). The image is commended to be made in ten-tala measures.

Iconography of Kalki Myth

Markandeya Purana Padma Samhita (18.38-39) and Mayasisha Samhita (23.28) described Kalki as two armed, holding sword in his right hand and shield in his left. Mayasisha Samihita else-where (23.381) described four armed Kalki, carrying in the Upper hands coch and discuss (typical weavens of Visnu) and in the normed hands word and bow; His back is adorned by a quiever of arrows. Padmasmhita (18.38-39) also suggest a form of Kalki with four arms, as above, and sword and shield in the normal hands will assume the gestures of protection and boon bestowal. And other text provides in the normal left hand black coloured noose (pasam Krshnanibham) and in the corresponding right hand an inverted death dealing edged.

All the texts prescribe that Kalki must be shown as riding a horse (hayarudham) and wearing garmens of leather (charma Vasana). According to Padma Samhita the sage Narada or Yajnavalkya is seen on his right side, as Kalki's officiating priest. Kalki is figured as engaged in a battle and always victorious (Yuddha virajitam) often Kalki is represented Symbolically by a horse on a back of wihc stands a sword bolt upright. Atternately He is a human figure with the horse's head.

Apart from the Visnudharmottara Purana, Agni Purana and other Samhitas referred to above, the Naradiya Samhita is another source book in Sanskrit on iconography. Following are the verses from this text, descrbing iconographical features of the ten Vaisnava incarnations :



Fig.1 Matsya, 9th C. A.D., Udaipur Museum



Fig.1 Matsya, C. 10th C. A.D., Chamba



Fig.3 Kurma, 10th C. A.D., Gwalior Museum



Fig.4 Varaha, 7th C. A.D., Ramacandra Temple Rajim



**Fig.5 Varaha, 9th C. A.D., Sachia Mata Temple,
Osian Jodhpur**



Fig.6 Narasimha, 5th C. A.D., Deogarh



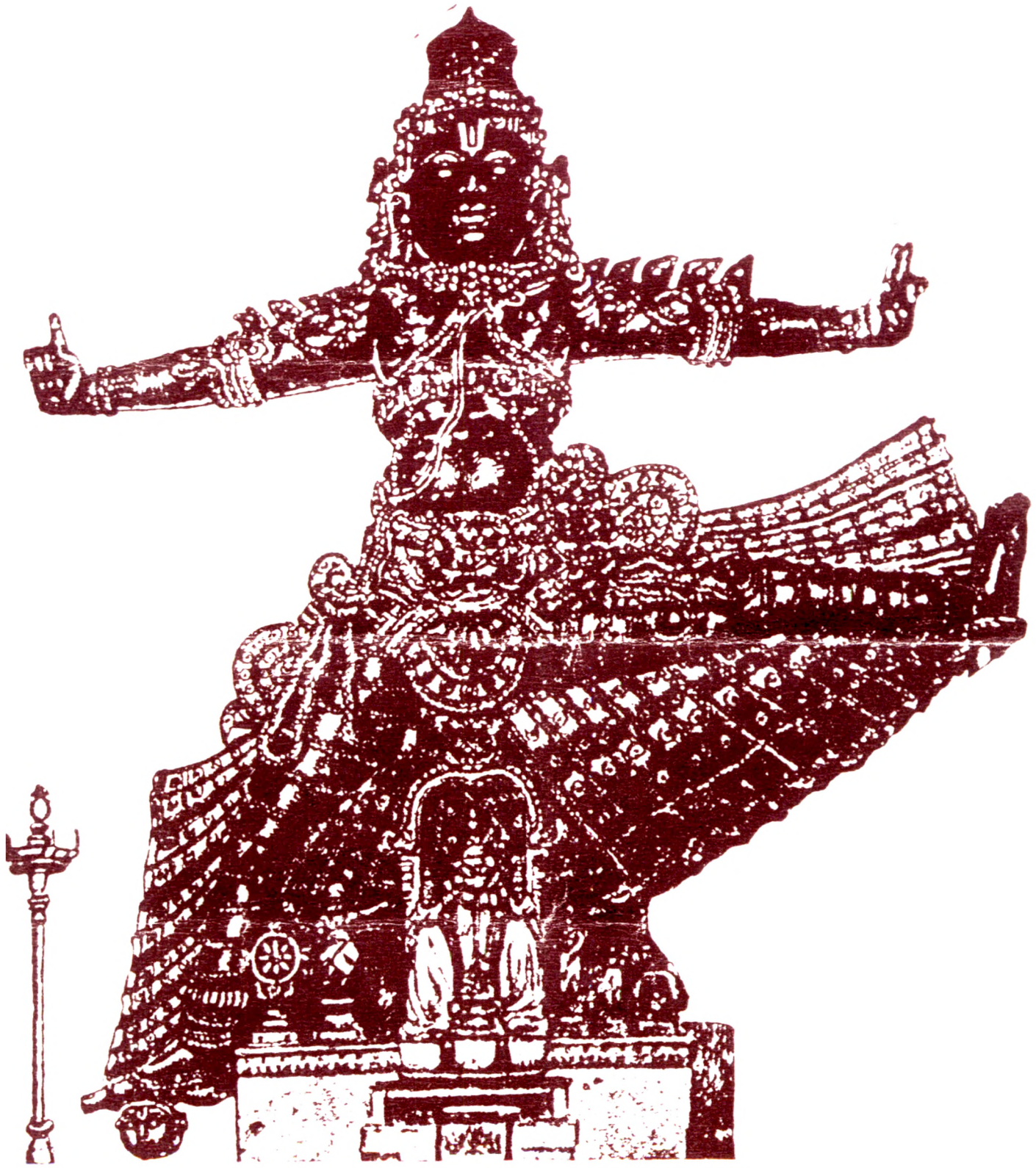
Fig.7 Narasimha, 9th C. A.D., Lucknow Museum



**Fig.8 Vamana-Trivikrama, 8th C. A.D., Indian
Museum Calcutta**



**ig.9 Vamana-Trivikrama, 9th C. A.D., Harihara Temple I,
Osian, Jodhpur**



**Fig.10 Vaman Murthy, (Sri Ulagalandha Perumal)
Trivikrama Temple Kanchi**



Fig.11 Parasurama, 14th C. A.D., Chamba



Fig.12 Ahalya-uddhara, 5th C. A.D., Deogarg



**ig.12 Kubjodhara, 10th C. A.D., Lakshmana Temple,
Khajuraho**



Fig.13 Sakatabhanga, 5th C. A.D., Deograh



**Fig.15 Buddha, 4th C. A.D., M.S university Of Baroda
Dept of Ancient History & Archeology**



Fig.16 Kalki