

An Independent Image of Lord Narsingh at Dudhai, Lalitpur Uttar Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Narsimha is the fourth incarnation of Vishnu. The name itself, a compound of Nara(man) and Simha(Lion), is the authority for such a form. Only the face is that of a lion while the body is of a man same as in Nrirvarah(boar incarnation) images of Vishnu. The story behind the primary form of this incarnatory form of Vishnu is well known, and one of the several attributive epithets of the Avatara, viz., sthauna(from the word sthuna meaning a column) is significant. The present paper is about an image of Narsingh which is about 50 feet high and was not much known to people because of its hidden appearance in a forest area.

Keywords: Narsingh (4th Incarnation of Vishnu), Colossal Statue, Man Lion, Hiranyaksh, Hiranyakashipu, Prahlad, Ancient Iconography.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dudhai is situated in 24^o25' N and 78^o23'E, 20 miles south of Lalitpur town of Uttar Pradesh. The town stood on the second scrap of Vindhya on the bank of an artificial lake. It must once have been of great importance, but nothing is known of its history.¹ The area of Lalitpur is very rich in ancient resources of History. Many ancient temples have been discovered from this region which belonged to Gupta period and onwards. The present image of Lord Narsingh is also dateable to Gupta period. Narsingh the Lion Avatara, is the furious or Ugra aspect of Vishnu par excellence, yet he is one of the most complex of his incarnations. He is represented in aniconic, theriomorphic, or

anthropomorphic (with lion head) form. The important places of Gupta period sculptures and temples are Devgarh, Pali, Siron, Chandpur, Jahaj pur, Dudhai etc.

The Imperial gazetteer mentions two fine temples and the remains of a circular building low flat roofed cell. This is now identified as Chaushath Yogini temple. In the forest area of about 3 kms from these temples is a huge rock cut image of Narsingh, which is approximately 30 feet high. The site is now being protected by Archaeological Survey of India but most of its part is now in a dilapidated condition due to weather erosion. This rock cut huge image of Narsingh is so beautiful that the mouth of Nar singh

has a natural red colour rock showing him in ferocious form. If some one looks at the face it resembles as if vermillion is pasted on face. But as we go closure we find that it is the natural colour of rock that makes the face orange.

As Lakshmi Subramaniam has remarked-“ One must remember that the facial expression , posture and ferocity of Lord Narsimha is probably one of the most difficult to depict even for an exemplary artist. It can be said therefore that this image carved on the rock surface is simply incredible and is the testimony to the genius and mastery of the Guptas.”²

According to historians and Archaeologists, this rock cut image is roughly thirty feet in height and carved as per the rock formation. A close look at the rock reveals the mouth of Lord Narsimha slightly open with his sharp teeth and tongue strangely red in colour that locals say due to colour of rock. The rainwater runoff on the rock surface only makes the fierce expression of Lord Narsimha all the more captivating. Mythologically Narsingh defeats the demon Hiranyakasyap, who had received through austerities a five fold boon from Brahma- that he not meet death indoors or outdoors, during night or at day, by a man or a beast, by means of weapons, on earth or in the sky- and set out avenging the death of his brother (Hiranyaksha) by prohibiting the worship of Vishnu(Hiranyaksh was killed by Varaha).

Lord Narsimha- Narsimha is the fourth incarnation of Vishnu. The name itself, a compound of Nara(man) and Simha(Lion), is the authority for such a form. Only the face is that of a lion while the body is of a man same as in Nrivarah(boar incarnation) images of Vishnu. The story behind the primary form of this incarnatory form of Vishnu is well known, and one of the several attributive epithets of the Avatara, viz., sthauna(from the word sthuna meaning a column) is significant.³ The God came out of the column when it was broken in anger by the demon Hiranyakasipu a great enemy of hari (Vishnu). His son Prahlad was a great devotee of God. Hiranyakashyap made thousand

efforts to divert his mind from the bhakti of God Vishnu but Prahlad was adamant to worship Hari. Hiranyakashyaap asked Prahlad in anger -:where is your God let me see”. Prahlad said he is everywhere even in this Crystal column before them. Hiranyakashyap kicked at it and there appeared the Lord in his ferocious form, felled the demon on his thighs and opened his stomach and killed him. Many reliefs depicting this theme have been recovered from various parts of India, and a large number of them represent either the combat between the god and the demon or the killing of the latter by the former.⁴

Many reliefs depicting these themes have been recovered from various parts of India, and a large number of them represented either the combat between God and Demon or the killing of the latter by the former. E,B Havell says- “ At Ellora the Sculptor had chosen the moment when the terrific apparition of the man lion rushes forth to seize Hiranya who, taken unawares and with the mocking taunt still on his lips, makes a desperate efforts to defend himself; he speaks highly about the technical strength and imaginative power manifest in the treatment of the subject.”⁵

According to Matsya Purana- ‘ The God and Demon should be shown fighting with their legs interlocked; the former should appear being repeatedly attacked by the tired demon who should be shown as holding a sword and a shield.’⁶

In Bundelkhand region many images of Narsingh and Varaha avtar of Vishnu are found. Most of them are now preserved in Museums but few are still in situ. A four armed narsingh seated in Sukhasana on a lotus holding chakra, gada and Shankh(the front left hand resting on the left Knee) with probably Prahlada in the right corner paying respect to his God is shown carved inside a ‘Chaitya Window’ niche in the Gupta temple at Deogarh. But this image is shown in peaceful mudra, tranquillity and yogic meditation. Gopinath Rao calls it Kevala Narsingh.⁷

As mentioned by G.C.Tripathi- “Under the influence of Tantric and Shakta ideas, the concept of Narsingh

as an incarnation of Vishnu, became elevated to an independent deity with a furious character, in the manner of Bhairava, who not only destroys all the evils befalling his worshippers but in addition bestows upon them the benefit of virtue, wealth, love and salvation as mentioned in Brahma Purana(55.1-77).⁸

For iconographic purposes Gopinath Rao divides the images of Narsingha into three groups.

1. Sthauna –Nrisimha
2. Girija- Nrisimha(Hill born) is that he appeared from maountain cave.
3. Yanaka- Nrisimha as mentioned in Viikhanasagama.

Vishnudharmottara Purana gives a detail description – “He has a lion’s face and the body of a man. He wears blue garments and bears a halo. He stands in alidha pose and is adorned with all ornaments. His face and manes are surrounded with flames.... The chest of Hiranyakasipu, who rest on the knee of the God, should be shown as being severed by his sharp nails.”⁹ The present image of Narsingh is to be categorised in Girija Narsingh. This four armed image of Narsingh is carved on a mountain rock, and is 50 feet high. It is the earliest surviving four armed iconography of Narsingh. The back uplifted hands are without ayudhas and appear as if they are about to slap the demon. Narsingh is frontally depicted in alidha with the demon stretched across his left thigh, the legs of the demon hanging limp, while his uplifted left foot is planted on a column. The entire figure is so precisely carved that the jaws are appearing as if flames of fire are coming out of his mouth. The natural red colour stone make it so natural as if the god is in furious form and appeared as a terrible mood. This image dated back to Gupta period and is covered with forest for quite a long time and therefore not much tourist attracted towards it. Now with the clearing of forest areas these hills are visible to people and therefore we come across such a huge image of Narsingh. The god is depicted with full ornaments as his drapery is

visible after so much of destruction by weathering. This image is now under the protection of Archaeological Survey of India and reaching to this place is not a hurdle.

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Figure 1. Statue of Lord Narsingh at Dudhai Forest Area