

An Interesting Image of Varāha from Madhubani

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From Sagatu, a dried tank in the village Salempur, district Madhubani, Bihar a few stone sculptures came to light on 6th March, 2010. Amongst them a Varāha image, approximately 1.10x0.55 metre in size carved out from a local stone of grayish colour deserves notice (Figs.1-2).

This is a four-armed figure standing in *pratyālīḍha* pose with *gadā*, *cakra*, *śaṅkha* and



Fig.2



Fig.1

inverted *padma* in hands clockwise. Miniature figure of Pṛthvī seated cross-legged with hands in adoration can be seen on the elbow of god's upraised extra left hand. As usual the Varāha in his hybrid form is profusely bejeweled. The right leg of the god is planted on the snake coils, while the upraised

left rests on the lotus flower supported by the hybrid Nāgī with both of her

hands. On the right flank stands a similar Nāga holding thick lotus stalk, which ultimately ends in the shape of 'lotus umbrella' (*padmātapatra*) over the head of the god. A big flower with thick stem serves as 'filler' on the corresponding side. The horizontal series of the snake coils below is well connected with seated Nāgī supporting the lotus. There are clear indications of its being interlinked with the standing Nāga on the other side.

Below the serpent coils appears the big double lotus (*viśvapadma*). The lowest register of the *saptaratha* pedestal evinces vertical lotus stem and several human figures, including Garuḍa, seated in adoration in the vaults of the lotus leaves.

What is most significant and unusual is appearance of a small theriomorphic boar in between the strides of the standing hybrid Varāha.

The tenon below the pedestal is apparently for fixing the image firmly. No image of Varāha of this type has been reported till now.

Rejoinder – N. P. Joshi

The image with simultaneous depiction of hybrid and theriomorphic Varāha known as Nṛ-varāha and Yajña-varāha is iconographically interesting. In literature, both the forms have been well spoken of, but in sculptural art the position is slightly different. Nṛ-varāha appears on the scene right from the Kuṣāṇa period as is clear from the four-armed figure carrying charioted Sun and Moon in hands hailing from Mathura, now housed in the local Museum (GMM.65.15).¹ This form continued to enjoy popularity in the succeeding ages practically throughout the country. So much so that even from around Bannu in North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan, a Nṛ-varāha figure with Sessianian influence datable to c. 5th century CE has been reported.² The case with Yajña-varāha is different. The form starts appearing from the Gupta period, the most significant one is the *sarvadevamaya ekaśṛṅga* Varāha from Eran in U.P. and the other one at Ramtek in Maharashtra. Other colossal image of later period is at Khajuraho. Medieval images of varying sizes can be seen in the Museums at Nagpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, etc. Curiously enough, no such image in stone in our knowledge has been reported from far South as well as from Eastern India, but for depicting theriomorphic Varāha, the sculptors of Eastern India seem to have taken a different course. Let us take in account some such figures :

Apart from the Varāha sculpture under reference, the following parallels have been reported from Bangladesh.

(i) Vajrayoginī, district Munshiganj

Bangladesh National Museum, c. 12th century CE.³

Hybrid, right foot planted on Ādiśeṣa, who is in *añjalimudrā*, left raised and placed on lotus held by Nāgī. The god is flanked by Lakṣmī on right and Sarasvatī on left; small theriomorphic boar between the striding legs of the god. Garuḍa is below on pedestal.

(ii) Deopara Gadgri, Rajshahi district

Varendra Research Museum, c. 11th century.⁴

By and large similar to above, but Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are absent and the theriomorphic boar is clearly standing and pressing his snout in the ground.

(iii) Northern Bangladesh

Mahasthan Museum, c. 10th century.

By and large similar to above, Garuḍa too is absent and in front of the theriomorphic tiny boar between the legs there is a small seated female figure with right hand raised above and the left placed on the ground behind.

In all the four sculptures along with the hybrid form as the main figure, the theriomorphic form has also been shown in miniature size. In other words, two stages of the Varāha episode have been depicted together. For proper interpretation of this sort of depiction the account recorded in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* proves helpful, which in brief runs as follows :

'Brahmā requested Viṣṇu to make the earth (Pṛthivī) available to him for creation, which was then submerged under the masses of water. Thereupon Viṣṇu appeared from Brahmā's nostrils as a thumb-size (*aṅguṣṭha parimāṇaka*) piglet. Instantly it developed and turned in the form of a colossal boar, entered the waters and rose up with Pṛthvī on his white tusk. Paying no attention to the disturbing attack of the demon Hiraṇyākṣa, he came up and placed Pṛthvī firmly on water. He then proceeded to fight with the demon with *gadā* and *cakra* in hands. Ultimately, Hiraṇyākṣa met death due to the god's slap on his face.⁵ Obviously, this was done by Varāha in his hybrid (Nṛ-varāha) form.

The sculptors of Eastern India have depicted both the stages of the

episode. The small theriomorphic boar suggests the earlier stage. This boar also deserves acute observation. In one case, that is Deopara figure (ii above) the boar is standing and pressing his snout in the ground as if starts the mission.

The Mahasthan figure (iii above) shows a tiny seated female figure with right hand raised above, obviously requesting the god to lift her. Later stage is that the victorious Nṛ-varāha appears as the main deity and here also following the iconographic canons, miniature Pṛthvī has been given place on his raised elbow.

In short, this sort of depiction of both the parts of the episode together seems to be a regional trend of Eastern Indian Art.

Though known in Bangladesh, it is interesting to note that it has travelled upto Madhubani in Bihar. Of course no parallel has yet been reported from this region.

References

1. *Śilpasahasradala*, Vol.2, entry VAv.1, VPl.15, p.108.
2. *Ibid.*, entry VAv.2, VPl.16, p.108.
3. *Sculptures in Bangladesh*, Edtrs. Enamul Haque & Adalbert J. Gail, Dhaka, 2008, Coloured Plate 9; Pl.211, p.195; Pl.213, p.254.
(We are thankful to Dr. Niraj Pandey for this information).
4. *Bhāgavata.*, III.13.18-28; 13.33.
5. *Ibid.*, III.19.1-26.

For sake of comparative-study attention may be drawn towards a sculpture datable to post fifth century, which shows Viṣṇu standing behind a big theriomorphic Varāha (*Śilpasahasradala*, Vol.2, entry VAv.3, VPl.17, p.110). It is a North Indian product, but exact provenance is not known. In this case, the parent deity and the transformed form have been shown together.