

Monolithic Lakṣmī-Narasimha Statue from Hampi

K. M. Suresh

Hampi, once the capital city of Vijayanagara Empire from CE 1336 to 1565, is now a small village, situated (Lat. 15°-20' N and Long.70°-30' E) on the southern bank of the river Tungabhadra, in Hospet Taluk, Bellary district of Karnataka.¹ The word Hampe or Hampi is generally held to be a later Kannada form of the ancient term Pampā. During the medieval period, Hampi was also known as Pampākṣetra,² Bhāskarakṣetra,³ Pampā Tīrtha (of the *Rāmāyaṇa* fame),⁴ Pampā,⁵ and so on. References to the site in inscriptions, copperplate grants and literary works are numerous. A poetical account describes that "its rampart was Hemakūṭa, its moat the auspicious Tuṅgabhadrā, its guardian the world protector Virupākṣa, its ruler the great king of kings, Harihara."⁶

Hampi, once forming part of the Vijayanagara city, is a hallowed resort, being surrounded by hills of Purāṇic fame and situated close to the perennial water-flow in the river Tuṅgabhadrā. Places like Hemakūṭa hill, Pampāsras where Pārvatī did penance to win the hands of Śiva, Ṛṣyamukha-āśrama, the abode of Anjñadhri, the āśrama of Mataṅgaṛṣi and the cave dwelling of Śabarī, as mentioned in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁷ were all said to have been here and are traditionally identified by the local people even now.

It is rather difficult to trace the origin of Narasimha worship because early Brahmanical literature is silent on this aspect. The story of Narasimha *avatāra*, is in someway similar to that of Varāha and the Purāṇic form of the legend is linked with the preceding *avatāra*.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Narasimha is considered to be one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. It is said that Viṣṇu assumed many different forms, namely, Varāha,

Narasimha and Mānuṣa, in order to protect the world.⁸ The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* makes only a passing reference to the Man-Lion incarnation. It only states that after his father had been put to death by Viṣṇu in the form of Man-Lion, Prahalāda became the ruler of the Daityas.⁹ In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,¹⁰ the story assumes slightly in different form: Hiraṇyakaśipu had proclaimed his supremacy and sovereignty over the three worlds and no one in his kingdom was allowed to acknowledge the supremacy of any god. Prahalāda, his own son, however, turned to be a great devotee of Viṣṇu, even at the risk of his father's wrath. Once, Hiraṇyakaśipu asked him, if Viṣṇu was present everywhere why was he not visible in the pillar of the hall where they had assembled and saying this he struck the pillar with his foot, which broke as under. No sooner he did that, Viṣṇu in the *Narasimhāvatāra* (Man-Lion) issued from the cleft and tore off the bosom of the demon king Hiraṇyakaśipu. These accounts show the common origin of the myth and hence Wilson is probably justified in presuming that the Narasimha myth is a popular legend adopted by the worshippers of Viṣṇu to serve their purpose.¹¹

The *Matsya Purāṇa*,¹² describes vividly the fight between the *asura* Hiraṇyakaśipu and the god Viṣṇu-Narasimha. According to it, the image of Narasimha is to be eight-handed, fierce looking and having the face of a Lion with thick mane. He should be shown to be tearing out the entrails of the *asura*. The legs should be interlocked and the *asura* should be shown attacking with a *khadga* and round *khetaka*. The *Agni Purāṇa*,¹³ describes the four-handed image of Narasimha, two of his hands should be holding the *cakra* and *gadā* and he should be striking the bosom of the *asura* with the other two hands. The *asura* should be lying on his left thigh. According to another description given in the same *Agni-purāṇa*, Narasimha should have the *cakra* and *śankha* in his upper two hands while the other two lower hands should be engaged in killing the *asura* Hiraṇyakaśipu.¹⁴

The images of Viṣṇu as Narasimha are of two kinds, namely - *Sthānaka-mūrti* and *Āsana-mūrti*.

(i) Sthānaka-mūrti : The conception underlying the *Sthānaka* Narasimha is that the Man-Lion in the case came out of a pillar, in a standing posture with the lower left hand in *varada mudrā*, which is, blessing posture. The upper right and left hands hold as usual *cakra* and *śankha*, respectively.

(ii) **Āsana-mūrti** : *Āsana-mūrti*, generally a single figure, is shown seated on a *padmāsana* in the *utkuṭikāsana* with *yoga-paṭṭa* going round the knees and back of the body. This type of *mūrti* is called *Kevala* Narasimha and it may have either two or four hands. The upper right and left hands hold *śaṅkha* and *cakra* and other two hands stretched forward to support the bent knees. This form of Narasimha is also called *Yoga* Narasimha. Sometimes the lower left hand of *Yoga* Narasimha is shown in *varada mudrā*.

(iii) **Lakṣmī-Narasimha Mūrti** : Some of the texts describe Narasimha as seated with Lakṣmī on his left lap. The *Skanda Purāṇa* says that Narasimha has a calm appearance when he is embracing Lakṣmī. He holds the *cakra* and *śaṅkha* and his eyes are like sun and moon. His hands are extended to the knees and he is on a lotus.

During the Vijayanagara period, the worship of Narasimha form of Viṣṇu gained wide popularity, particularly during the rule of kings belonging to Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties, who had inclination towards Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism, propounded by Rāmānuja and his followers in Tamil and Kannada countries. As a result of this, we come across a variety of Narasimha images carved and worshipped during the Vijayanagara period. It is also to be noted here as a part of impact of the *bhakti* movement practiced and popularized by Rāmānuja, Alvars and other followers. This benign aspect of Narasimha gained wide popularity, although at few places the ferocious aspect is also represented more in the course of narrating the story rather than worshipping the ferocious form of Narasimha.

Monolithic Lakṣmī-Narasimha Statue

This is one of the best examples at Hampi, which is hewn out of single granite block of stone. This was carved in CE 1528¹⁵ during the reign of king Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who had made an endowment, details of which are embodied in an inscribed slab seen in front of the temple. At times this statue was wrongly identified by some scholars¹⁶ and the local people called it as Ugra-Narasimha.

This monolithic statue originally had a temple built around it, which consisted only sanctum-sanctorum and the roof, which has fallen down except the four walls; but there was enough room to have *pradakṣiṇā-patha* around the statue as can be seen now.



Monolithic Lakṣmī-Narasimha Statue, Hampi

Viṣṇu is shown as Narasimha with the head of a Lion. He is seated in *utkuṭikāsana* posture under the canopy of a coiled *āsana* of seven-hooded *Nāga Ādiśeṣa*. Now it is very much destroyed and mutilated. His legs are in the required position and bound by the *yogapaṭṭa* and the feet are crossed. He has four arms, all are broken, wears a *kirīṭamukuṭa*, necklace, wristlets, waist-girdle, anklets and loose anklets. Lakṣmī is supposed to have been seated on the left lap of Narasimha, but at present only her right hand is seen going round the back of Narasimha.

The face, being that of a Lion, has a ferocious look with prominently projecting globular eyes and a wide mouth with mane underneath. Over the Lakṣmī-Narasimha statue is provided a *prabhāvalī* with *kīrtimukha*, which is in the centre above the seven-hooded *nāga*.

All the broken parts of Lakṣmī and Narasiṃha have since been collected and kept nearby for renovation work to be conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India.

The height of this monolithic statue of Lakṣmī-Narasiṃha is 6.70 meters.

References & Notes

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3. *South Indian Inscriptions*, Vol.IX, part 2. No.271, p.68.
4. *Ibid.*, No.260, p.57.
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7. Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (Aranyakāṇḍa) & Pampa Mahatme in *Skanda-purāṇa*.
8. *Mahābhārata*, XII, 337, 34-36.
9. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, XX.
10. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, VII, 8.10.
12. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 4269, 31-34.
13. *Agni Purāṇa*, 4.49, 4.
14. *Ibid.*, 49, 17.
15. *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy*, 1889, No.34; *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.I, pp.398-404; MAR-1920, p.15.
16. R.N. Saletore, *Vijayanagara Art*, ND, 1982, Fig.28.