

Āditya-Varāha : A Unique Syncretistic Image

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The *Kalāmaṇḍapa*, that is the Museum in Jñāna-Pravāha, Varanasi, houses a very interesting syncretistic image of Āditya-Varāha namely a combined form of Sūrya and Nṛvarāha (acc. no. 2003.42, size - 24 × 39 cm) (figs. 1,2). It is a buff coloured sandstone figure of Nṛvarāha standing in *samabhaṅga* pose with upraised face (in profile) turned to right. In his normal hands raised to the shoulders, he carries short stemmed full blown lotuses while his feet is covered with tasselled shoes, obviously the characteristic features of Sūrya images and reminding us of Vedic relationship of Sūrya and Viṣṇu as Āditya. The god puts on lower garment covering the knees and an *uttariya* rolling round the two arms forming a big loop in front. He has a waist band, perhaps *avyaṅga*, with a small loop on right thigh. An *ekāvalī* with prominent bead in centre, two armlets and wristlets are the only ornaments. The crown or head-gear of any sort is conspicuously absent, instead there appears a beautiful full blown lotus over the head, which reminds us of lotus umbrella (*padmātapatra*) seen in later images of Nṛvarāha¹. The god is being flanked by two badly corroded human figures, one to the right seems to be carrying a short staff like thing. He could perhaps be Daṇḍa, one of the two acolytes of Sūrya. On the basis of delineation of the image, beaded round *prabhāmaṇḍala* with floral decoration, curly locks of hair rolling on shoulder, the two lotuses and style of their holding, the image can safely be assigned to c. 5th-6th century C.E.

In the field of Brahmanical sculptures the syncretistic images had specific purpose to serve. It need not be stressed that 'One in all' or one Supreme manifesting in multifarious forms and shapes (*ekoham bahusyām*) is the basic concept of Brahmanical way of philosophical thinking. This very idea played a dominant role in bridging up rivalries between different sects like Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śaktas, Sauras etc. Śaṅkarācārya, who introduced 'worship of the five' (*pañcādevopāsanā*) was of course the most significant personality, who worked in this direction, but even prior to him a start to that effect was made in the field of sculptural art. It was done by introducing three types of depictions, namely :

1. Different deities, often called *vyūhas*, emanating from one and the same

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body, *Caturvyūha* Viṣṇu from Mathura (GMM 14.392-95) and *Caturvyūha* Śiva from Musanagar² are some such examples.

2. The other way was to show miniature figures of several deities on different limbs of the main body or its surrounding area. The figures of Yajña-Varāha i.e. Boar in zoomorphic form, from Eran³ (c. 5th century C.E.) or images of Viśvarūpa Viṣṇu in post Gupta ages⁴ can be cited as few instances.
3. The third way was to suggest simultaneous presence of more than one deity in single form through faces, hands, attributes, mounts, consorts, attendants etc. Syncretistic figures of Hari-Hara-Pitāmaha. Ardhanārīśvara Hari-Hara etc. belong to this class.

Mutual combinations of Śiva and Viṣṇu or composite forms of Śiva and Pārvatī (Ardhanārīśvara), or Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (Vāsudeva-Kamalajā), or Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā or even their appearance with Buddha and Lokeśvara are well known in sculptural art.

Sūrya is another important deity commanding respect, prayers and all honours right from the Vedic times. We are in know of his synchronization with various deities and accordingly the icons concerned bear their combined names. In such images, the characteristic features of Sūrya namely full blown lotuses in normal hands, sleeved well decorated tunic, belt or *avyaṅga*, feet covered with high boots or tasselled shoes (specially in north India) and sometimes horse drawn chariot, are seen combined with those of the other deities in one and the same image.

Among such images those of Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa are pretty common, probably because the name Viṣṇu appears as the name of one Āditya among the group of the twelve Ādityas as per lists recorded in *Agni-purāṇa*⁵ and *Devatā mūrti-prakaraṇa*⁶. The twelfth Āditya Viṣṇu is of blue colour and associated with Amṛta Śakti, Kārtika *māsa*, Mīna *rāśi* and Saumya or Uttara *diśā*. His *āyudhas* are *cakra* and *padma*. In sculptures Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa appears with four or six hands and barring full blown lotuses in normal hands, in many cases either he carries Vaiṣṇava weapons or sits in *padmāsana* with hands folded inwards and kept one over the other near the navel.

Besides Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa, we are in know of the images like Sūrya-Śiva (Hingalajagarh, Central Museum, Indore, M.P.), Sūrya-Brahmā (Khajuraho, Modhera, as well as Dinajpur in Bangladesh), Hari-Hara-Sūrya-Pitāmaha (Naṭaraja temple, Chidambaram), Sūrya-Sarasvatī (Chitodgadh, Rajasthan)⁷ and even Sūrya-Lokeśvara⁸ and Hari-Hara-Sūrya-Buddha⁹.

The sculpture in Jñāna-Pravāha under reference is unique in several respects:

1. Association of Sūrya with Nṛvarāha as one of the attributes is seen in a Kuṣāṇa figure of Nṛvarāha from Mathura (GMM 65.15), but in this case the two deities have been combined.
2. Varāha-Avatāra had gained wide popularity in the Gupta period and this is perhaps the earliest syncretistic figure of Āditya-Varāha.
3. This is the only example wherein Sūrya and any of the incarnations of Viṣṇu have been synchronized. No parallel has yet been reported even datable to later ages.
4. Normally Nṛvarāha is seen facing to left but here he is facing right.
5. The image seems to reveal the fusion of Vaiṣṇava and Saura sects in that early age.

Notes and References

1. For example, Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculptures of Allahabad Museum*, Pl. LXXXIV, p. 100.
2. N.P.Joshi, A Unique Figure of Śiva from Musanagar, *Bulletin of Museums and Archaeology*. U.P., Lucknow, 3 June 1969, pp. 25-29.
3. J.C.Harle, *Gupta Sculptures*, 1974, Pl. 24.
4. *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, Edtr. Ratan Parimoo, 1987, Figs. 39, 40.
5. *Agni-purāṇa*, 51.5 - 10.
6. *Devatāmūrti-prakarāṇa*, 4.22-23, pp. 64-65.
7. Dinesh Kumar, चित्तौड़गढ़ की आदित्य सरस्वती प्रतिमाएँ, *aPrāgdhāra*, Lucknow, 8, Pls. 121-122, p. 223ff.
8. J.N.Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, Pl. XLVIII/3.
9. J.N.Banerjea, *Ibid.*, Pl. XLVIII/1.





Fig. 1 : Āditya-Varāha



Fig. 2 : Details of fig.1.