Srimushnam is a small town in Cuddalore district in Tamilnadu. It is located some 39 km west of Chidambaram and 19 km south east of Vridhachalam. In the center of Srimushnam two temples are situated back-to-back, which is very unusual. A temple to Vishnu in his Varaha Avatara faces West, and a Shiva temple at its back faces East. Srimushnam is a very sacred place to Vaishnavites and it is one of the eight Swayam Vyakta (having come into existence by itself) shrines of Vaishnavas and one of the 108 Vaishnava Sthalas (Dhivya desams). Vishnu is worshipped as Bhuvaraha, in his third incarnation as Varaha or Boar saving the Earth or Bhu in the form of a goddess from the clutches of demon Hiranyaksha. Therefore this temple is also known as Varaha Kshetra, the Place of the Boar. Srimushnam is also known as Nadunattu Thiruppathi, Anandha Bhavanam and Jilikavanam. The ancient name of this place was Sungam Thavirtha Cholanallur. Traditionally it is said that lord Vishnu resides in this particular place in three forms; first in the form of Bhuvaraha, second in the form of the Ashwatha tree, and third as the Nithya Pushkarani, the sacred pond. The main shrine of the Shiva temple belongs to the Early Chola (Kulothunga Chola I) period 1070 – 1125 AD. Rulers of the Vijayanagar Empire (1336–1646) took special interest in its renovation and constructed mandabams along with additional shrines. They also systematised the daily Pujas (rituals) and designed important vahanas such as the thiru ther (temple vehicle). The main sanctum sanctorum of this temple enshrines the captivating icon of Lord Bhuvarahasvami. This image is in a victorious standing posture (Akimbo pose) with his hands on his hip, with his face is turning towards the South. The image faces west, but his face is turned towards the South as he had just vanquished Hiranyakashipu. The Lord has two hands, and the conch (shanku) and discus (chakra) are inserted near his waist. This rare image, approximately two feet in height is made up of Saligramam stone. Saligram represents the Saguna form of absolute. It is a black

egg shaped object, the remains of folsized ammonite. It has a golden streak within its cavity and is obtained from the river, notably the river gandaki. Each of these has a hole through which are visible several interior spiral grooves resembling the representation of the Chakra or the discus of Lord Vishnu. The processional image, placed in front of the main sanctum in the ardha-mandapa is a beautiful image of a standing Vishnu with four hands called Yajnavaraha sided by Sri Devi and Bhu Devi. A tiny metal icon of Varahamurthy is seen near these images.

The chief sculptural feature of the temple is that the temple has several chambers in it. The main sanctum’s entrance, through a mandapa, Purushasukta mandapa, is supported by sixteen pillars. The sixteen pillars of this mandapa was built in the Nayaka period. The carvings of the pillars were followed the traditional Vijayanagara style of architecture. Between the main gopura and the sixteen-pillared hall is the hundred-pillared mandapa belonging to the age of the Maratha kings of Tanjavur. There is a tiny shrine for Garuda facing the main sanctum in between these two mandapa. Apart from the images, enshrined in the Sri Bhuvarasvami temple, are numerous forms of Vishnu, Gajalakshmi, Garuda and Hanuman. Life-size sculptures of King Achchuthappa (the Garuda Sthamba) Nayaka who is said to have constructed this mandapa, his brothers and other members of his family are also found here. The Vimana over the main sanctum is known as Paavana Vimana and is crowned with a gold-plated kalasa. In the second prakara of this temple, are seen the sanctums of Ambhujavalli Thayar, the consort of Lord Varaha and the sanctum for Andal both facing east. The Udayarpalayam mandapa, situated nearby of the Sri Bhuvarasvami Temple, also known as kannadi arai (mirror room), is the place where the God and the Goddess are beautifully decorated and placed for the devotees to worship during Brahmotsavam. The other sanctums
in the outer enclosure are for Sri Venugopala, Vishvaksetra, Vedanta Desika, Tirumangai Azhvar, Manavala Mamuni and Thirukkacchi Nambi.

Sri Bhuvarasvami Temple has two gopuras. The Western (Rajagopura) gopura on the side is seven storied high building, and is 130 feet in height. Well-wrought panels of miniature carvings articulating many stories from the epics and Puranas surround the main gopura. Those figures of dancers and musicians at the same time adorn the inner-side of the doorway of the Bhuvaraswami temple. There is an image of Srinivasa Perumal on the inner side of this gopura and His holy feet (Tiruvadi) is found on the ground level, and devotees entering this shrine should first worship Lord Srinivasa, before ascending the steep steps. The Northern gopura of this temple is a medium-sized in structure and is a five storied building. The doorway of this gopura is opened only during Vaikunta Ekadasi day when the deity is taken out this way in procession and is called Vaikunta Vasal. Outside the temple, at a short distance in front of the gopura, there is erected a 20 feet high unique Garuda-stambha (pillar), at the top of which is placed the figure of Garuda with folded hand in anjali mudra, facing the temple. The sacred temple-tank known as Nitya Pushkarini is very large and is situated behind the temple. The sthala-vriksha or the sacred tree of this temple is the Ashvatha tree (Arasa maram) and it is seen near the pushkarini. On the north side, of the Bhuvarakasvami temple, is a shrine for Lord Rama where idols of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Shatrughna and Hanuman, as seen in the coronation ceremony (pattabhisheka) are placed.

The temple belongs to Chola period and it is improvised later by Vijayanagara Nayaks who had also constructed the ratha. The ratha is about 60 feet in height and is stationed near the
front gate. It is now completely covered and placed inside a shed. Nearby, there is a thermuttam from where the utsavar would be shifted to the car, during the car festival. An interesting event is that the uthsavar, during Maasi festival visits to a village near Bhuvanagiri (Killai) every year to a muslim darga and accepts special offerings. Another interesting point is the offering of a sweetened prasadam prepared from Korai roots.

The car is of Nagara – Dravida\(^4\) style car having a square aadhara (base). Above the aadhar, is a boothappar and achchuppar I and an octagonal upa-peeta, comprising vigrahappar, aswabandhana and adhisthana. Pertaining to the number wheels, it is classified under Visala or Visalakka\(^5\) style, having six wheels. The total height of the Srimushnam car is roughly around 60 feet in height. The outer 4 wheels are made up of solid iron and the inner two wheels are of wood. The diameter of the outer wheel is 7.75 feet. The wheels are connected by placing iron girders for axles (aksha or achchukkattai) transversely, through nave (nabhi) points. The inner wheels are attached to the inner cross bars. The axle bands pass through the holes (chchidra) in the wheels and are secured by linchpins (kadaiyanis).

\(^5\) Ibid.
Boothappar has seven cross bars placed lengthwise in the boothappar. The ends of the longitudinal cross bars on both sides are covered by a miniature image of Varaha in the middle bar and other avatars of Vishnu such as Srirama and Krishna, besides a depiction of Mohini in the other bars. The first and the seventh cut ends are covered by a boothagana in (Fig. 4: Srimushnam Car Sketch) seated on a simple peeta, his head towered by a seven hooded naga. The longitudinal cross bars of boothappar are connected together with transversely placed wooden bars and their cut edges are also covered with floral motifs. Achchuppar I is placed above the boothappar. The wooden logs are so arranged as to form a square dias. The outer surface of the achchuppar is covered by mouldings called upana, padma, kampa, kanta, kapotaka and vajanas. The projecting cut ends of the logs are covered with floral motifs.

Vigrahappar, which is placed above the Achchuppar I, is square in shape with a cut at its corners (Fig. 5: Plinth of the Car) so as to form two niches, on each of the eight sides which lodges icons. The edge of the panels and corners bear yalis and horse riders. Achchuppar II is above the vigrahappar. Wooden slabs placed one up on the other in criss-cross style form the achchuppar II. This portion of the ratha consists of four talas, Uthara, Kampa, Vallabhi and mathalai in between each of these are aswabandhana decorations Above
achteppar II is built achchuppar III. Both the parts are held together by supporting vertical wooden bars covered with simhayalis.

Aswabandhana which is seen between achchuppars II and III, is octagonal in shape with a cut on the corners, providing two niches in which an image is engraved. At each of the eight corners are fixed figures of yalis. Achuchuppar III is a wooden structure formed by two layers of wooden slabs. Architecturally, this member is also designed with Uthara, Kampa, Vallabhi and mathalai. The cultural decorations here are similar to achchuppar II.

Adhisthana is the main part of the temple car where, the entire episode of Varaha avatars as narrated in the sthalapurana, is depicted. Above the achchuppar III is the Narasana, a platform on which the priests and others sit at the time of the procession during the festivals.

Narasana is octagonal in shape with no decorations. The priest and other dignitaries occupy this portion during the car procession.

Devasana is smaller in dimension above narasana and is cut octogonally. It is formed by three layers of wooden slabs placed one upon the other. The moulds covering the sides are missing. Padmasana is circular in shape and is a very important part of the ratha as it is on this platform that the idol of the utsavamurthi is placed during the procession.

Pillars of the Srimushnam car are forty eight in number. The pillars are all plain and square in shape. They are dismantled on the
closure of the festival. *Vimana* is twenty seven feet in height and comprises of four *kodungai* and their height is 27 feet. The *kodungai* are built with *bamboo* sticks fastened with ropes. They are fixed at the time of festivals and are dismantled after the festival is over. The *kodungai* are also octagonal in shape and they are covered with *thiraiseelai* during festival time. The *Sikara* is 5 feet and the *kalasa* is 3 feet in height. An umbrella is fixed above the *kalasa* (*kudai*) and is 1.25 feet in height and 3.7 feet in diameter.

Srimushnam car has no platforms or porticos, except for the *narasana*. Hence an iron platform was fixed about six years ago, both in front and back sides. The platform was fixed by removing a few cross beams of the *achchuppar* and driven into the base of the *ratha* and secured with iron girdles.

Srimushnam temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu and hence, the temple car is decorated with Vishnu and his various manifestations. There are 24 varieties of Vishnu images, described in *Mahabharatha*, *Agni Puranas* and *Rupamandana*, each differentiated with different combinations of the four emblems of Vishnu, the Shankha, Chakra, Gadha and Padma. A later text, the *Sathvata Samhitha* refers to six handed, eight

---

handed, ten handed and twelve handed images of Vishnu. The *Vaikhanasagama* describes the images of Lord Vishnu as *Sthanaka* (standing), *Aasana* (sitting) and *Shayana* (reclining) and these are further classified into *Yoga*, *Bhoga*, *Vira* and *Abhicharika* varieties. These are further divided into *Uthama*, *Madhyama* and *Adhama*.

Among the Sthanakamurthis, *Yogasthanakamurthi* has four hands holding shankha and chakra in his back hands while the right front hand is in *abhaya mudra* and the front left hand is kept on his hip (*katyavalambithahastha*). He is accompanied with his subordinates Shiva and Brahma, the Bujakamunis Bhriigu and Markandeya and other demigods, like Chandra, Suriya etc. The *Bhogasthanakamurthi*, along with his weapons, is associated with his consorts, Shridevi on his right and Bhudevi on his left side, besides Shiva, Brahma, Birgu, Markandeya and other demigods. The *Virasthanakamurthi* carries shankha and chakra. He is not associated with his consorts but is seen with the attendants. The *Abhicharkamurthi* has two or four hands and is standing alone without any other attendants.

Among the Aasanamurthis, *Yogasanamurthi* is seated in *padmasana* with a *jatamakuta* and his fronts hands are in *yogamudra*. He is accompanied with Bhrigu and Markandeya, Shiva and Brahma and other demigods. *Bhogasanamurthi* is seated on a simhasana along with his consorts on his sides and other attendants. Out of four hands, the front left hand rests on his hip or in the lap while the other three holds shanka, chakra and abhayamudra. *Virasanamurthi* sits on a simhasana, while his consorts are seated on the floor, with all other attendants. He is four handed with his usual weapons and mudras. *Abicharakasanmurthi* sits either on a simple *vedikasana*, or on the coils of Adhisesha or on the shoulder of Garuda. He is two handed or four handed.

Among the Shayanamurthis, *Yogashayanamurthi* is half-reclining with his right leg stretched out on the bed of Adhisheha and his left leg is slightly flexed. Of the two hands, the right hand is stretched back, holding his head while his left hand rests on the thigh. He is
associated with Brahma, Shiva, Bhrigu and other attendants except his consorts. 

_Bhogashayananamurthi_ is similar to Yogasana but is associated with Sridevi and Bhudevi. _Virashayananamurthi_ is four handed, two holding shankha and Chakra, the third supporting the head and the fourth stretched along the thigh. The _abhicharikashayanamurthi_ lies in deep slumber scantily clothed and is not associated with any attendants. The depiction of Lord Vishnu, if associated with all his attendants is called _Uthama_. If Shiva and Brahma are missing, then it is _Madhyama_ and if Bhrigu, Markandeya and other demigods like Surya are missing, then it is _Adhama_. Many forms of yoga, bhoga, vira and abhichaikamurthis are engraved in the Srimushnam car.

Apart from these, the _ten_ avatars of Vishnu, viz., _Matsya_ (fish), _Koorma_ (tortoise), _Varaha_ (boar), _Narasimha_ (half-human half-lion), _Vamana_ (dwarf later turning out huge _Trivikrama_), _Parasurama_, _Rama_, _Balarama_ and _Krishna_ except _Kalki_, but including his _Mohini_ manifestation and many scenes related to the avatars are also engraved in this car.

The temple car is enshrined with more than 200 figures or reliefs and several icons apart from the _yalis_ and other imaginary and decorative items. Lord Vishnu and his ten _avatharams_ occupy an important place in _Srimushnam car_, along with other images. As the temple is dedicated to Bhuvarahaswamy, the _Varaha (Boar) Avatham_ is the highlight.

The _Adhisthana_, _Aswabandhana_, _Vigrahappar_ and _boothappar_ are decorated with plentiful Vaishnavite iconography and are intact while the decorative elements on the Devasana
and Padmasana are damaged. The main panels in *adhisthana* on each side have got five images, bordered with plantain like decorations on each side. The edges are guarded by elephants on each side. On either side of the elephants are dwarapalagas. The projections are further divided into four parts, each carrying an image of Vishnu or some of his manifestations. The *ashwabandhana* on each side have got *seven* images, deeply placed above the achchuppar II. This panel is guarded by *makara-yali*, ie, a yali sitting on a makara. The front of this par is decoratively placed brackets engraved with *seven yalis*. The middle one is a *gaja-vyala* (elephant faced yali). On its sides are two raring horses and four supernatural animal figures appearing like simhas. These brackets are connecting the second and third achchuppars. The corner panel, as in adhisthana, has two bends, each containing an image and is guarded by *makara-yalis*. The *Vigrahappar* on each side comprises *nine* images, guarded by *horseriders*, a rider sitting on a galloping horse which is controlled or guided by four other warriors or men. The cross beams of *boothappars* which extends *antero-posteriorly* are *five* in number. The middle of the cut surfaces is covered with *Varahamurthy* with his face turned to his left. The second and fourth edges are covered with *Vishnu*, in standing poses. The first and last beams carry the boothaganas, hovered by a seven headed snake, in sitting poses.

The sculptures on front side panels in the *Adhisthana* are decorated with the reliefs of *Dasavatharas of Vishnu* and other themes associated with him. The short middle panel of the
Adhisthana depicts the Sthalapurana, associated with the temple, wherein the entire story is depicted. Hiranyaksha, the king of the asuras, once, had taken the Earth or Prithivi and rolled her into a mat and carried her into the depths of the cosmic ocean. Vishnu adopted the form of a boar and entered the ocean. The battle between Varaha and Hiranyaksha lasted for a thousand years and the demon was gored to death in the end. The boar raised the earth up on his tusks and restored the earth once again in its place in the universe. Interestingly, Varaha is depicted entirely in the form of a boar, unlike the usual portrayal of the deity in human and animal form. The first relief on the extreme right depicts the emergence of the boar (Varaha) from the nostrils of Brahma. The front right hand of Brahma holds a tiny figure of the boar. In the next relief is seen, the figure of a large sized wild boar in movement, as though pursuing Hiranyaksha. The third relief shows Hiranyaksha holding a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left hand, holding the earth folded as a mat. The next relief depicts the fight between Varaha and Hiranyaksha. Here is seen the fallen figure of Hiranyaksha, clutching on to the earth and Varaha pouncing on him. The last scene shows Varaha (Cosmic Varaha) carrying the earth (mat) on his snout. On either side of the panel are plantain like decorations in bunches and Dwarapala figures. The Aswabandhanappar has carvings of seven

---


figures in reliefs. The figures are unclear and unidentifiable. The panel is fronted with vertical bands decorated with yalis. The Vigrahappar contains nine figures or reliefs of which two figures on the extreme right and left are of dwarapalas while the rests

(Fig. 14: Vigrahappar Panel)

are of Vishnu, all very elaborately decorated. The dwarapalas hold a shanku and chakra in the upper right and left hands and a gada in the lower hand with the other hand being in abhayamudra. In the middle of the panel is carved with Bhuvarahaswamy. The first relief is a ten handed Bhogasthanakamurthi, carrying a gadha, chakra, padma (lotus), darpana and a sickle on his right side a shankha, pasa, sword and a danta and the fifth hand is hanging down, resting on a slender gadha. He is associated with Sridevi on his right and Bhudevi on his left.

The second relief is Mohini is with Sridevi and Bhudevi standing on her sides. she is two handed carrying a gadha and a trumpet on her right hand and a folded vasthra on her left hand which is resting on a slender gadha.

The third is another Bhogasthanakamurthi with his consorts and he is four handed, carrying a shankha and chakra in his back hands and holds abhaya mudra in his front right hand. His front left hand hangs down, resting on a gadha. The fourth relief is Bhuvaraha in akimbo pose and the fifth relief is yagnavaraha. The sixth relief is Virasayanamurthi (Ananthanarayana or Sheshasayi). The seventh is another Bhogasayanamurthi.
In this third boar avatar, Bhuvaraha\(^9\) is depicted in *tribhanga*, with his legs slightly bent at the knees and his head held high (*akimbo*). He stands alone without his consorts. He carries no shanka, chakra or gadha. The right hand rests on the hip while the left hand clutches the upper *vasthra* draped over the shoulder and spread out on both sides. The lower *vasthra* covers the body below calves. The clothings and the ornaments on the chest are rather lavish and he wears a *kiritamakuta* on his head.

(Fig. 14: Bhuvaraha)

Another representation of Vishnu as Varaha is that of *Yagnavaraha*\(^10\) with his consort Laksmi. Vishnu has the boar face and has four hands with usual *shankha* and *chakra* in his back hands, the front hand showing *abhaya* pose and his front left hand embracing Laksmi’s left shoulder. His right leg is slightly bent and hung, touching the *peeta*, but his left leg, bent and hung, is put on the head of the single headed Snake (*Adhiseshha*). Laksmi with her hands folded, showing *anjalimudra*, is seated on Vishnu’s left thigh. She is wearing a *kiritamakuta*.

(Fig. 15: Yagnavaraha)

*Sheshasayi*\(^11\) is also known as *Jalasayanamurthy* or *Sayanavishnu* or *Ranganatha* or *Padmanabha* (one with lotus naval). In this picture, Vishnu is depicted in *Virashayana* posture. He is reclining on the coils of the snake, *Adhiseshha*. He has two hands. His right hand is bent and placed by the side of his head,

---


while the other hand lies flat on his thigh. His legs are stretched along the bed of *adhisesa*. A *lotus* emerging from his naval bears a figure of *Bramha* whose three heads are visible. *Bhudevi* with a *water lily* in her left hand is found sitting near his head and *Sridevi* with a *lotus* in her right hand at his foot end. Both are seen sitting in *sukhasana*. The seven hooded serpent, *adhisesa*, is seen towering over all of them. Below his bed, *Vishnu* with his consorts is seen depicted with in a *prabhavali*. The figures in the niches of both left and right corners are missing.

In the left side panels panel of Adhisthana, the middle panel of the car possesses five images. From left to right, the first relief is of *Balakrishna*, the second is a six headed *Arumuga*, the third is a standing *Ganapthi*, the fourth is *Virasthanakamurthi* standing in *dvibhanga* pose and fifth relief is *Sri Rama* in *yana* posture (kneeling) with his bow and arrow.

When Markandeya had a penance, Lord *Vishnu* appear and he asked the Lord a boon to see his magic. After few days, there was a nonstop rain and wind. There was water
everywhere. Markandeya noticed the small boy, floating on a banyan tree leaf. The baby was sucking his foot by holding his left leg. That small boy is the Vatapathrasayi. Krishna is here portrayed as Balakrishna, *Vatapathrasayi*\(^\text{12}\). Typical of this depiction is that he is seen lying on his back on a leaf of a *vata* (banyan) tree, his hair is tied in a knot and is wearing anklets and bracelets. His left leg is bent and folded over his abdomen and his big toe is kept in his mouth while his right leg is half extended downwards.  

Arumuga\(^\text{13}\) is also known as Karthikeya, Kumara, Skandha, Subramanya and Shanmuga. He is the second son of Shiva and Parvathi. Born out of life source slipped from Shiva. As the seed was too hot for Parvathi to carry it in her womb, Agni, the god of fire conveyed the seed to the Ganges river, where it was fostered by six Krithikas. As a result Skandha developed six heads (Aru Muhas). Skandha is the god of war and the leader of the divine armies. He rides the pea-cock, seen with six faces. In the relief, he is seated in *sukhasana* pose. Out of six hands which are visible, one of his right hands is in *abhaya* mudra and one of his left hand holds a *kavadi*, the cane of which is kept on his lap. All his six heads are decorated with *kiritamakutas*.

\(^{12}\) Meppathur Narayana Bhattadhri: Narayaneyam, (2006, Sri Ramakrishna mission, Madras), pp139 - 141

Prasanna Ganapathi\textsuperscript{14} is also known as Vigneswara, the Lord of Beginning. He is the elephant headed God. He was the son of Parvathi, conceived out of the rubbing of her skin, attribute of Ganesha include his broken of left tusk, that he used to write the Mahabharatha. He rides on a mooshika. In the relief, he is standing on a \emph{padmasana} and is in a \emph{samabhanga} pose. He has four hands, the back hands carrying \emph{ankusa} and \emph{pasa}, while the front hands are in \emph{abhaya} and \emph{varadha} mudras. (Fig. 21: Prasanna Ganapathi)

On the ashwabhandhana panel are seven images, all in erotic postures, some of them are shown here, without any explanation as they are not clear and unexplainable. In the Vigrahappar panel, there are nine images, guarded by horse riders. Among the nine figures, the middle five are separated by \emph{yalis}. The first figure is little unclear, while the second and eighth figures are \emph{Mohini} and the ninth one is Siva and Mohini. The third figure is SriRama with his bow and arrow, the bow being stretched and the arrow being aimed at a target. The fourth is the image of \emph{Vamana} avatar, \emph{Trivikrama}. The

is the image of Garuda Narayana. The sixth is Sri Rama with Lakshmana. The seventh is a battle scene between Vali and Sugreeva.

Sri Rama is the seventh Avatar of Lord Vishnu. He is one of the popular figures and an idol hero to the devotees in Hinduism, especially to the Vaishnavaitees. The whole story of Rama from his birth upto his ascent to Heaven is given in the famous Sanskrit epic of Valmiki Ramayana and in Tamil Kambaramayana. In this relief, Sri Rama is standing in *alidhapadha* pose, with his body in *tribhangha*. He is wearing a *kiritamakuta* and a *kantamala* on his neck. His left hand carries a bow while his right hand holds and stretches an arrow, as if aiming a target.

Bali Chakravarthi, son of Virochana and the grandson of Prahalada, the great devotee of Vishnu, conducted an Ashwametha Yaga, to attain the sacrifice of Lord Indra. Vishnu was unwilling to see Indra to lose his position. So he approached Bali in the form of a Dwarf Brahmin, demanding a gift of land measurable with three steps. In this form Vishnu is known as Vamana. When the gift was granted, Vamana grew into a gigantic form and placed his first pace and measured the whole of booloha or the earth. With his another step, he measured the anthariksha loka or the mid-world between the earth and heaven. There was, thus, nothing left to measure the third pace of space which Bali has promised. Thereupon Bali
requested Vishnu to utilize own his head for measuring out the third pace. In this form, Lord Vishnu is known as *Trivikrama*. In the *Trivikrama* image, the right leg is raised high up to his hip. Vishnu has four hands, the right hand being raised in *chin* mudra, the left hand is in *varada* mudra. The other pair hands carries the *shankha* and *chakra*. He is adorned with a high *kirita*, *hara* and *kheyura* and other ornaments. Beneath his raised right leg, there is *Bali* in a seated position, with his head slightly bent and hands in *anjali* mudra.

*Garudanarayana* is the form in which Vishnu is presented as mounted on his *Garuda vahana* (eagle). In this form, Vishnu is depicted with four hands; the left and right back hands holds the *shanku* and *chakra* while his lower hands are in *abhaya* and *varada* mudras. Garuda is seen in human or *zoomorphic* form, with *wings* and an aquiline nose. Vishnu sits on his neck with his legs suspended below which *garuda* bears with both of his hands. The deity and his vehicle are adorned with *kiritamakuta* and *kanda mala*. An *elephant* with its front legs raised is seen on his right side. A *crocodile* like animal is also seen lying on the floor. In this image, *Rama* and a slightly shorter *Lakshmana* are standing in standing posture. He is shown holding a bow and arrow. carrying *bow* and *arrows*. Lakshmana is standing right to Rama with his hands folded in an *anjali* mudra. Both are adorned with high *kiritamakutas* and heavy ornaments and draped till the calves.

---


16 Ibid: p29.
Sugreeva was the younger brother of Vali, the ruler of the monkey kingdom *kishkindha*. He aided Rama in the quest to release Sita from the hands of Rakshaha king Ravana. When Vali had a fight with a demon in a deep cave, he told Sugreeva to wait outside. When Vali did not return and on hearing a demonic shout and seeing the blood in the cave, Sugreeva concluded that his brother was killed. He returned to Kishkindha and assumed the kingship. Vali, however returned home after killing the demon. Vali decided that his brother had betrayed him. He did not listen to Sugreeva, and started fight with Sugreeva and chased away. In this relief, *Vali* and Sugreeva are seen in a hand to hand fight. Vali’s right hand and Sugreeva’s left hand are raised above shoulders as if ready to hit the other. Their other hands are seen intertwined. Both are wearing high *kiritamakuta* on their heads and *kandamala* on their necks. Mohini is the only female Avatara of Lord Vishnu. She defeats *Bhasmasura*, the ashdemon. When the demon made severe penance, Shiva was pleased with him and granted a power to turn anyone into ashes by touching his head. The demon decided to try the power on Shiva itself, Shiva ran terrified. Vishnu transformed into Mohini and charmed Bhasmasura. The demon asked her to marry him. Mohini agreed and tricked him to put his hand on his own head. The demon was reduced to ashes. In this relief, she is standing with her legs crossing over her right leg in *kunjitha* pose. Her left hand is holding a mirror as if she is looking into it and her right hand is

---

raised above and kept on her head, the act tricked the demon and put his hand on his own head. She is beautiful and fully dressed and is not wearing any makuta, but is adorned with many ornaments. She is standing near a sunflower bush. Near her foot is lying a makara, with its head slightly raised and looking at her.

In another relief, which is similar to the first, but differs in that she holds a veena in her hands instead of a mirror. Both these figures seem to be functioning as dwarapaligis, being positioned in the corners.

(Fig. 33): Mohini II)

*Siva* and *Mohini* are portrayed as standing in alinghana pose. Siva’s right hand is embracing Mohini. Mohini’s left hand is embracing Siva. Siva’s left hand is caressing her breasts. Both his legs are fixed firmly in the ground. Mohini’s legs are fixed on the ground, while her left leg is encircling Siva’s hip. Both are wearing karandamakuta on their heads and haras are decorating their necks. Both are stark naked and are in erotic posture. Near their feet is seen a small figure of a child, Hariharaputhra, sitting with his hands touching on the ground.

(Fig. 34: Mohini and Siva)

The top panel on the back side of the Adhisthana is etched with five figures bordered by a banana bunch and an elephant on either side. The first one is the *Mathsya* (Fish) avatar of Vishnu. He is in the *zoo-morphic* form, with a upper part in human and a lower part in the form of a *fish*. He is four handed with his usual weapons and mudras. The second is *Koorma* (Tortoise) avatar, with an upper human and a lower part in the form of a *tortoise*, carrying his usual weapons. The third is *Varaha* (Boar) avatar, the fourth is *Narasimha* (Half-human, with
lion face) avatar and the fifth is the *Vamana* (Dwarf) avatar\(^\text{18}\). In the end on the right side is *Mohini* with a mirror and on the left *Vishnu* in standing posture, both functioning as the dwarpalakas. Next to the dwarpalakas, some images are missing.

The Aswabhandhana panel contains seven figures and are obscured by a row of brackets of supernatural animal figures appearing like simhas and raring horses. The first one is a *dwarapaliki*, standing in *tribhanga* pose with a boar standing near her, with its head turned towards left. The second one is *Adhinarayana* sitting on the coil of *adhishesha* with his heads spanning over the head of *Vishnu*. His left front hand, instead of keeping *varadha* pose, is hanging down his knee, and carries the *conch*. His left back hand carries the *chakra*. The third figure is partly visible

---

and shows a *Mohini* in *tribhanga* pose with her right hand holding a *gadha* and her left hand is simply handing down. The fourth figure is *Vishnu* standing in the middle with his weapons and *Bhudevi*, with a flower in her left hand and *Sridevi* with a flower in her right hand are standing beside him in *tribhanga* poses. Their other hands are hanging loosely on their thighs. The fifth and sixth are partially visible and are indefinable. The seventh is a dwarapaligi sitting on a swan. The figures next to the dwarapaligis are not clear and next to them are yalis on both sides and each is standing on a *makara*.

The Vigrahappar panel contains nine images, with seven of Vishnu and two figures at extremes on the right and left being that of dwarapalakas. The second image is *Lakshminarayana*, the third is *Bhoga-sthanakamurthy*, the fourth is *Abhicharakasthanamurthy*, the fifth is *Yagnvarahamurthy*, the sixth is *Lakshminarasimha*, the seventh is *Venugopala* and the eighth is *Bhuvraha*. On their outer ends are, the horse riders, one on each side.

As *Lakshminarayana* 19, Vishnu is seated upon a simple unadorned seat (*Vedikasana*). He is fourhanded and his right upper hand holds a *shanka* and the lower right hand is in *abhaya* mudra. His upper left hand embraces Lakshmi and his lower left hand is not visible. He is seated in *sukhasana*, with his right leg hanging down while his left leg is folded on the

---

seat. Lakshmi is seated on his left thigh, with her hands in anjali mudra while both her legs are hanging down and kept on a lotus peeta.

This Bhogasthanakamurthy\textsuperscript{20} form is standing in dvibhanga pose. He is wearing a kiritamakuta besides haras and kheyuras. He has four hands, the two upper hands bearing shanka and chakra. The right front hand is in abhaya pose, while his left front hand is hanging down and resting on his thigh, made to be in kataka pose. The figure of Bhudevi is seen standing on right side. She is in tribhanga pose and carry a nilotpal flower in her left hand and her right hand is loosely hanging down. On his left side is Lakshmi standing in tribhanga and her right hand holds a, lotus while her left hand is simply hanging down.

This form of Vishnu, Abhicharika-asanamurthy\textsuperscript{21}, (Fig. 41: Abhicharikasanamurthi) is seated on a vedikasana (a simple asana) in sukhasana. He has four hands, with shanka, chakra and abhaya and varadha mudras. He is sitting alone with neither Bhudevi nor Sridevi. He is seen with a kiritamakuta on his head and various ornaments in his chest, ankles and arms.

This Yagnavarahamurthy\textsuperscript{22} is also in sitting pose in sukhasana. His boar head wears a karandamakuta. His right hands carry a chakra and is in abhaya mudra. His left hand is seen embracing (Fig. 42: Yagnavarahamurti)

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p87.
\textsuperscript{22} Tagore, Ganesh Vasudeo: Bhagavatha Purana, p 22.
Bhudevi. Bhudevi is seated on Vishnu’s left thigh, her legs hanging down loosely, in *abhaya* with while her hands are in *anjali* mudra.

This form is called as *Lakshmi Narasimha*\(^\text{23}\). Narasimha is seated in a *a sukhasan pose*, with his right leg hanging down and the left leg bent and folded flat upon the seat. The upper hands hold the *shankha* and *Chakra*. The front right hand is in *abhaya* mudra and the front left hand embraces his consort. On his lap, *Laksmi* is seated with both of her legs hanging down. Lakshmi’s hands are seen in *anjali* mudra. Narasimha is seen wearing *kiritamakuta*, *kheyura* and other *haras* and a *yajnopavitha*. Lakshmi is seen with *karandamakuta* and other ornaments adorning her.

*Venugopala*\(^\text{24}\) or *Ganagopala* seems to delight his followers, with his enchanting *music*. Standing in a *tribhanga* pose, the left leg is resting on the ground. His right leg is thrown across the front of his left leg so as to touch the floor with his right toe. The *flute* is held in both hands, the mouth-end of the flute is touching his lips. He is wearing a *kirita* and ornaments on the chest and waist. His back left hand carries a *shanka* while his back right hand is not visible. He is surrounded by cows and oxen.

On the *adhisthana* of the right side, the panel has five images. The first one is a single headed but ten handed image of *Mahishuramardhini*. The second is unidentifiable, the third is of *Parasurama* with a *parasu* in his right hand and *Balarama* with a plough on his shoulder.


The fourth is of *Rama, Sita* and *Lakshmana* standing together and the fifth is another unidentifiable image. On the extreme ends are the figures of Mohini with the Vishnu’s weapons sitting as a dwarapalakis.

(Fig. 45: Right Side View of the Car)

(Fig. 46: Adhishthana Panel)

When the demon Mahisha troubled the gods, the gods were helpless and begged Durga to subdue him. Armed with weapons of god, including Shiva’s trident and Vishnu’s discus, Durga rode out of her lion and defeated Mahishaura in the battle. In the *Mahishasuramartini*\(^25\) relief, Durga is standing in tribangha pose. Her right leg is raised high crossing over her left leg in kunjitha pose and placed on the buffalo head of the Mahisasura. She wears a jatamakuta, with a Chandra-kala on it. Her chest is full with a narrow waist. She has ten hands. Her right five hands carry trisula, khadga, sakthiayudha(spear), chakra and a bow. Her left hands

*(Mahishasuramartini)*

---

carry the pasa, ankusa, khetaka, parasu and a bell.

The Vigrahappar panel should contain nine but only some are able to be pictured. It depicts a scene of Hiranyavatham and some scenes from Ramayana. The first one is Hiranyavatham, the second one is Hanuman conveying a message to Rama (I’ve seen Sita), the fourth one is Sri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana and the fifth one is Narasimha fighting with Hiranya. Bordering the images are two Mohinis, functioning as dwarapalagis. The two Mohinis are in tribhanga pose. One of their leg is fixed firmly on the ground while the other one is kept crossing the other at ankle level. Both are wearing jatamakuta and are ornamented with various jewels. On their shoulders two parrots are seated. Near their feet, are seen the figures of makara.

Hiranyakasibu\textsuperscript{26}, after a severe and devoted penance, got a boon from Brahma that he should not die either at the hands of any human or killed by any animal, neither in the day nor at night and neither inside or outside of a dwelling. He had ordered all his subjects to pray him. But his son Prahalada who was a stern devotee of Lord Narayana desisted and adhered to Lord Narayana. Hiranya subjected his son to many (Fig. 49: Hiranyavatham)

tortures. To save his devotee, Vishnu took the form of Narasimha (a zoo-morphic form with a human body and a leonine head). He, after a furious fight, killed Hiranya sitting on the doorstep, putting the demon on his lap, using leonine hands, at the time of dawn.

In this Sthauna Narasimha\textsuperscript{27} relief, Lord Vishnu, carrying out the *Hiranyavatham*, is another well executed figure. Vishnu as *Narasimha* with his lion face and eight hands, is seated on a *peeta*, and *Hiranya-Kasipu* is stretched out on his thighs, with the abdomen being ripped open by two of his hands while his right hands holds the legs of the demon and a left hand holds the demon’s *makuta* tightly. Two other hands, one right and one left, are held high, holding the drawn out entrails of the demon in the form of a garland. The pair of hands at the back carries the traditional *shankha* and *chakra*.

This one portrays the scene of Hanuman\textsuperscript{28}, who having seen Sita in *Ashokavana* in Lanka, comes back to disclose the news to Rama. In this scene, Rama is seen seated, with his left leg hanging down and his right leg crossing over his left knee. His right hand, in *gajahasta*, is extended and kept on his right knee and his left hand in *katyavalambita hasta* is resting on the plank. His head is slightly bent towards Hanuman as if listening to him. Hanuman is standing to the left of Rama. Legs held close, he is standing with slightly bent forward. His right hand is placed over his mouth as a gesture of reverence and his left hand is touching his chest. To the right of Rama is *Lakshmana* standing, his hands in *anjali* mudra and a *bow* held (Fig. 50: Rama and Hanuman) on his left shoulder. Below are seen, Vali and four other vanaras, all in standing postures and in anjali mudras.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid: pp192 - 193,
In this scene, Srirama is sitting on a throne like seat with Sita sitting on his left side. Rama is sitting in sukhasana, with his right leg is bent and hanging loosely which is held by Hanuman with his palms. His left leg is kept folded on the seat. He is adorned with a kiritamakuta on his head and haras in his chest. He is two handed, his right hand holding a gadha, while his left hand hanging down and kept on his left knee. Sita is seated on to the left side of Rama. Her right leg is bent at the knee and the knee joint and the foot are drawn close to the body and rest on the seat. Her left leg is kept folded on the seat. Her right hand holds a lotus while her left hand is loosely resting on the left knee. She also wears a kiritamakuta and various ornaments. Behind them are seen three maids, one is holding an umbrella and two others are fanning them with Chamaras. Some other demigods or attendants are also seen on the stage. Behind Sita, is Lakshmana standing in tribhanga pose, with his hands in anjali mudra and a bow hanging on his left shoulder. Below is Hanuman in yana pose, holding Rama’s right foot on his palms. Also, seen are Vali and four other vanaras with bows on their left shoulders, all standing in anjali mudras.

In this relief, Sri Rama\textsuperscript{29} is seen in standing posture as Kothandarama. He has two hands; the left hand is lifted up, holding the top of the bow and the right hand is bent at the elbow and is holding an arrow in it. To his right, is seen Sita in tribhanga pose. Her right hand simply hangs down and her left hand holds a conch. To

\textsuperscript{29} Padigar S. Srinivas, Vishnu Cult in Karnataka (1996, Directorate of Archeology and Museum, Mysore) p205.
the left of Rama stands Laksmana, with both of his hands folded and kept in anjali mudra. All are seen wearing kiritamakutas and various ornaments.

(Fig. 52: Sri Rama)

In this Sthaunananrasimha relief, the fighting scene of Narasimha and Hiranya-Kasipu is beautifully brought out. With a ferocious look, leonine teeth, protruding bulging eyes, Vishnu, with his four pair of hands encountering the demon. One pair of his hands holds the usual shanka and chakra. One of his left hands holds the demon’s right hand tightly, one another hand hold the Hiranyakasipu’s hip firmly. One of his right hand gives a punch to the demon’s stomach and another hand is trying to hit with a tight fist. The demon carries a sword in his right hand and a sphere (khetaya) in his left hand. Both of them are adorned with krritamakutas and other ornaments.

The devasana and padmasana in the peeta does not contain any image as they are damaged and removed. A slab containing the image of Mohini is seen in the front side of the padmasana panel. Similarly another image of Vishnu is seen in the front side of devasana.

The main deity (moolavar), is Bhuvarahaswamy, and he is seen in akimbo (Nindra Thirukkolam) pose. Unlike the typical moolavar deities in Vishnu temples, the Lord here is in the form of a small idol, signifying the Varaha Avatar. The deity is a Swayambu Murthi. He has a boar face and the face is turned towards his left side, fulfilling the request of Hiranyaksha who requested the Lord to turn his head towards him. He has two hands, kept folded on his hip. The right hand carries a chakra and his left hand carries a shanka. He is standing in samabhangha pose
with his legs fixed firmly on the peeta. His body is covered with golden plates. He is wearing a *kiiritamakuta*. *Bhudevi* stands on his right and *Sridevi* on his left side.

The processional deity (*Uthsavamurthy*) is *Yagnavarahaswamy*, and the goddesses are *Bhudevi* and *Sridevi*. Bhuvarahamurthy, when taken out for processon is known as *Yagnavarahaswamy*. All the three Utsavamurthies are made out of *panchaloha*. *Yagnavarahar* is human faced *Vishnu*, and is associated with *Bhudevi* and *Sridevi*. He has two hands, the right one is in *abhaya* mudra the left hand is in *varada* mudra. He holds shanku and chakra in his hands, and his gadha is kept on his left side. On his head is a karanda makuta, studded with precious gems. He is decorated with various golden and rathna haras and an yagnopavitha thread. To his right side is *Bhudevi* and his left is *Sridevi*. Both the devis have karandamakuta on their heads studded with precious gems. They are decorated with silk sarees and are decorated with golden haras and sacred thalis. *Sridevi’s* right hand holds a flower, while *Bhudevi’s* left hand is hidden under garlands. The other hands of both of them are simply hanging down along their sides. All the three are heavily garlanded.

The *Temple* at Srimushnam is an outstanding one from the point of religious as well as architectural history. The temple, a *Sacred Kshetra* for Sri *Vishnu* (*Bhu-Varahamurthy*), is the one which came out of *Vijayanagara Nayak* periods. Srimushnam temple car is very special to Hindus, especially to the devotees of Lord *Vishnu*. The temple car is unique, in the sense, it abodes only the images of Lord Vishnu and his avatars. All the reliefs are beautifully and clearly
carved. His *avatara leelas* are plenty and countless. However, the following *ten avatars* (*dhasavatars*) of Vishnu, are considered most important. The prime ten incarnations of Sri Maha vishnu are: *Matsya* (fish), *Koorma* (tortoise), *Varaha* (boar), *Narasimha* (half-human half-lion), *Vamana* (dwarf later turning out huge *Trivikrama*), *Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna* and *Kalki*. Except kalki, all the other avatars, with the scenes describing the events, are beautifully brought out as splendid images in this car. Mohini, his other manifestation, also came out very well.